



# Final Report to the Frontline Fund

Prepared by



**NOURISH**

The future of food in health care.

June 2021

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This report was prepared by the team and collaborators at [Nourish](#). Nourish aims to use the power of food to build health for people and the planet. We are a national community of practice empowering healthcare leadership in climate action and health equity. We work across community, institutional, and policy scales to steward innovation to transition to a more preventative, equitable, sustainable health system.



# Executive Summary & Introduction





# Executive Summary

With the onset of the pandemic, food insecurity was exacerbated and Indigenous communities, especially those that are rural and remote, experienced increased pressure on their food systems as a result of disruptions in food supply chains, reduced ability to travel and harvest, and fewer occasions to celebrate and share food together.

In response, Nourish took a multi-phase approach:

- **Phase 1 - Food Rx grants & knowledge exchanges:**

Nourish awarded five \$50k Food Rx grants to mobilize community-led, innovative, capacity-building projects that supported both food security and Indigenous foodways. Food Rx initiatives built and promoted Indigenous leadership and centered Indigenous foodways and values, supporting the transformation of health services to better reflect Indigenous understandings of food sovereignty and wellbeing.

Nourish hosted two virtual Food Rx grantee knowledge exchanges to facilitate networking, sharing, and peer learning between grantees, the Nourish team, and the Indigenous and Allies Advisory. Participants appreciated this space to share their insights, innovations, successes, challenges and questions.

- **Phase 2 - Short film:** Nourish produced a short film exploring food security, experiences of

anti-Indigenous systemic racism in health care, and the power of traditional Indigenous foodways. The film is called “Why does hospital food matter for reconciliation?” and [can be viewed here](#). It resonated with many across the country and has been viewed 3347 times in English (as of June 17, 2021), with a [version available with French subtitles](#) as well.

- **Phase 3 - National Action Learning series:** In April 2021, Nourish launched a national education Action Learning series called *Food is Our Medicine (FIOM)*. The Action Learning series highlights and amplifies Indigenous voices and perspectives to contextualize Indigenous foodways work through multimedia resources, and contributions of Indigenous leaders in medicine and systems change.

Additionally, FIOM features the work of several Indigenous artists in its visual identity and beadwork (the first 200 learners to complete the learning journey will be gifted a handcrafted beaded pin). FIOM provides health care leaders with knowledge and tools to decolonize food in health care and use it as an organizational pathway to deepen conversations about systemic racism and reconciliation.

- **Land-based learning grants:** With the end of the pandemic in view, seven teams in the Nourish Anchor Cohort will have access to grants up to \$7k to participate and host on-the-land learning and

relationship-building with Indigenous partners and knowledge keepers in their area. This program will start off in a good way with a Cultural Mindfulness session on June 28, hosted by George Couchie from Nipissing First Nation, with the goal of sowing the seeds or building upon existing relationships between health care, community organizations, and Indigenous communities.

Along with supporting Nourish programming, the Food Rx grants are addressing the unique challenges found at the complex intersection of three factors within health care: the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic anti-Indigenous racism, and food (in)security.

The entire process of this work was guided by the Nourish Indigenous and Allies Advisory, with participation from a wider circle of Indigenous leaders.

## Introduction

Nourish is pleased to present this final report on activities from September 15, 2020 to June 21, 2021 for the three phases of the project “Building healthier Northern and Indigenous communities through Nourish” contributing to the Frontline Fund’s pandemic response. The three phases included Indigenous Food Rx Grants and Knowledge Exchanges, the short film “Why Hospital Food Matters to Reconciliation,” and a final phase focused on building systems leadership around Indigenous knowledge, which centred on the *Food is Our Medicine* Action Learning series and land-based learning grants for health care leaders.

## Leadership of the Nourish Indigenous and Allies Advisory

Across each phase of the project, the Nourish Indigenous and Allies Advisory provided leadership and guidance on the approaches to, and direction of, Nourish’s Indigenous Foodways work with hospitals and health organizations. The advisory signalled strongly that as the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, how important and long overdue this crucial shift in hospitals and health care settings is towards building Indigenous health.

The advisory met monthly to give input and feedback on the proposed activities. Several advisory members also provided even deeper engagement throughout the three phases of the project including reviewing project proposals, participating in learning circles with leaders of the Indigenous health projects, and accompanying every step of the development and implementation of the *Food is Our Medicine* Action Learning series.

As we build back better from the pandemic, we can reimagine what food and health care can and should look like and address systemic issues. Racism, colonization and addressing the Indigenous health gap are not problems to tackle alone from the silos of professions or sectors. These are problems to take on together; like braiding sweetgrass, weaving wisdom, relationships, and perspectives.



# Phases 1 & 2



# Phases 1 & 2: Food Rx Grants, Knowledge Exchanges, Short Film

## Food Rx Grants

In phase 1, Nourish awarded five **\$50k Food Rx grants** to mobilize community-led, innovative, capacity-building projects that supported both Indigenous food security and Indigenous foodways. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated food insecurity and highlighted the intersections of social and structural inequities in Indigenous communities, particularly those that are rural and remote. The pandemic increased pressure on communities' food systems as a result of disruptions in food supply chains, reduced ability to travel and harvest, and led to fewer occasions to celebrate and share food together. Recognizing these challenges, Nourish awarded grants to Indigenous-led organizations and Indigenous focused programs to respond to the challenges of food insecurity, to build or expand food sovereignty projects, and to build back better.

Five grantees (two Indigenous community health centers and three regional/provincial health authorities) developed projects aligned with their local contexts and needs, varying in scale and approach according to each organization's scope and mandate. The community health organizations focused on self-determined, community-specific projects to alleviate individual and household level food insecurity while building Indigenous food sovereignty.



### Case Study

The **Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe'iyewigamig Health Access Centre** (WNHAC) delivered ice fishing, snaring and wild rice kits to community members. This was accompanied by virtual tutorials and storytelling with Elders and knowledge keepers. This initiative encouraged people to source traditional healthy foods while engaging with traditional teachings, techniques and foodways.

The grants awarded to larger health care organizations were used to develop pilot programs aimed at decolonizing institutional food service and integrating Indigenous ways of knowing and doing into operational policies and programs. All Food Rx initiatives supported and promoted Indigenous leadership and centered Indigenous foodways and values. Each approach supported the transformation of health services to better reflect Indigenous understandings of food sovereignty and wellbeing.

## Food Rx Knowledge Exchanges

Nourish hosted two virtual Food Rx grantee knowledge exchanges to facilitate networking, sharing, and learning between grantees, the Nourish team, and the Indigenous and Allies Advisory. Participants appreciated this space to share their insights, innovations, successes, challenges and questions. They expressed gratitude for the opportunity to connect with like-minded systems leaders and food system champions.

**“Thanks to the Knowledge Exchanges we were fortunate to attend, we came away feeling we had become part of a new community, and learned a great deal. Beyond hearing about the many different approaches, struggles, and successes, we have been particularly excited by discussions around creating a resource library to house educational videos created by other members.”**

— Representative from the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation

## Short film: “Why Hospital Food Matters for Reconciliation”

While these five projects were underway, Nourish produced a short film, [“Why Hospital Food Matters to Reconciliation.”](#) This film explored food security, experiences of anti-Indigenous systemic racism in health care, and the power of traditional Indigenous foodways as a path to reconciliation. We wanted to show how health care institutions have a responsibility and

obligation to support transformative systems change, and that a critical pathway forward is through food.

**“Nourish created a beautiful and powerful short film about why hospital food matters for reconciliation. Building connections between Indigenous communities and health care providers is the first step in providing care and food that heals.”**

— Nutrition student

The film profiled three Indigenous-led Food Rx grantees, as they practice and model anchor leadership by working with Indigenous communities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and food insecurity. These health care institutions showed commitment to examining and deconstructing colonial ways of operating. Several organizations sought guidance from surrounding communities on including traditional Indigenous recipes, ingredients, and weaving ways of knowing into their food services. The film highlights how organizations are both looking to and learning from Indigenous foodways, in turn creating more opportunities and space for Indigenous leadership and collaboration.

**“I was absolutely moved by the dynamic approach to the film using multimedia. It was inspired, matching the stories themselves. As it is said, ‘The future is here, it’s just not evenly distributed.’”**

— Film launch participant

**Watch:** [Check out the recording of the film launch event](#)



## Stories from the Field



The team at **Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation, Alberta**, shared that these funds prompted and facilitated partnerships between the hospital and six community organizations. This catalysed an interagency effort to build a coordinated, supportive food security network for urban Indigenous Peoples.

**“By reawakening and reviving old partnerships, we will be able to tap into the various strengths and specialties that already exist in the community, and use them to help solidify food security and sovereignty, and eventually health equity for our Indigenous peoples.”**



**Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe’iyewigamig Health Access Centre in Ontario** hosted Food is Medicine virtual events, which promoted traditional food knowledge and practices. These events were so successful and popular that it inspired a three-day virtual conference called “Living off the Land,” building further momentum towards, and engagement in, food sovereignty practices.

**“Building relationships is important as ever for continuing knowledge to be passed down regarding food security. These relationships may be with other organizations, partnerships, Elders, or Knowledge Keepers.”**



**Morning Sky Health and Wellness Society in Alberta** hand-delivered food hampers and food vouchers to 400 families and community members in Frog Lake First Nation.

**“The vouchers provided mid-month assistance for families during the COVID-19 pandemic who were under self-isolation as a result of close contact with a positive case. This allowed the families to have food provided during isolation until they were able to visit the local Income Support Office to sign the necessary documentation for assistance.”**

## Stories from the Field



The **Interior Health Authority of British Columbia** shared a critical shift in their organization's approach to food services:

**"It's not taking an Indigenous recipe out of a book and making it. It needs to be approached holistically. Senior leadership got to the point that they recognized that we needed an Indigenous chef, and we've learned so much from him."**

**"Food really is our medicine,** a common belief in Métis and First Nations populations, and we want to do our part to provide food that will respect Indigenous traditional foodways," said Charlotte Pilat Burns, Transition Specialist, Nutrition and Food Services at the **Saskatchewan Health Authority.**

Indigenous Foodways is honouring and in accordance with the SHA's commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation – Calls to Action.

SHA created a short film about this initiative. [Watch it here.](#)



## Impact by the Numbers

As of June 17, 2021,  
the short film has been  
viewed **3,347 times**.

## Key Learnings

The Food Rx grants, and supporting Nourish programming, are addressing the unique challenges found at the complex intersection of three factors within health care: the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic anti-Indigenous racism, and food insecurity. The projects exemplify that solutions to these challenges must vitalize Indigenous self-determination, knowledge and leadership. The Food Rx initiatives are examples of this, and show that health care organizations are recognizing the power of Indigenous foodways, and are increasingly looking to Indigenous leaders and communities for guidance and solutions. The five Food Rx projects highlight diverse ways that communities are integrating and promoting foodways in their responses to COVID-19. Indigenous communities provide ways forward that honour and apply Indigenous knowledge as part of their response to the challenges of the pandemic.

We saw that Indigenous-led community health organizations were able to quickly use funds to build or expand programs to support food sovereignty. Their close connection to the community facilitated an understanding of and responsiveness to evolving community needs. In contrast, the grantees in larger health care organizations required more time and consideration to develop culturally mindful and appropriate projects.

The Food Rx funding catalyzed needed relationship-building with Indigenous leaders and communities, as well as catalyzed political and organizational will to

design interventions differently than in the past; but both of these things take time. There is a need for champions and visionaries within the management of health care organizations to continue this work. Many structures and processes must be examined and often deconstructed, requiring dedicated time and clear mandates. This has been a challenge for organizations tackling workforce shortages, redeployment, and competing priorities related to the pandemic.

Beyond strengthening Indigenous foodways and food security, an additional benefit of these initiatives and programs was the notable impact on participants' mental and emotional health. Grantees reported that initiatives encouraging people to be out on the land and engaging with foodways, and/or receiving care packages such as food supplies, provided comfort, connection and a sense of wellbeing during a time of much distress and isolation.

**“These practices have helped people have a better connection with the land and the relationship with their food and provided an outlet during the pandemic that can be used for the rest of their lives.”**

— Food Rx Grantee (WNHAC)

Additionally, the grantees themselves expressed appreciation for the opportunities created by the Food Rx funding. One Indigenous chef noted,

**“[This project] has been a highlight of 36 years in food services.”**



COVID-19 created the conditions to accelerate food initiatives in communities, including a sense of urgency and increased willingness of stakeholders to converge and focus efforts to address wicked problems such as food security. The grants and projects facilitated the initiation and strengthening of partnerships, interagency collaboration, and relationships between organizations and their communities.

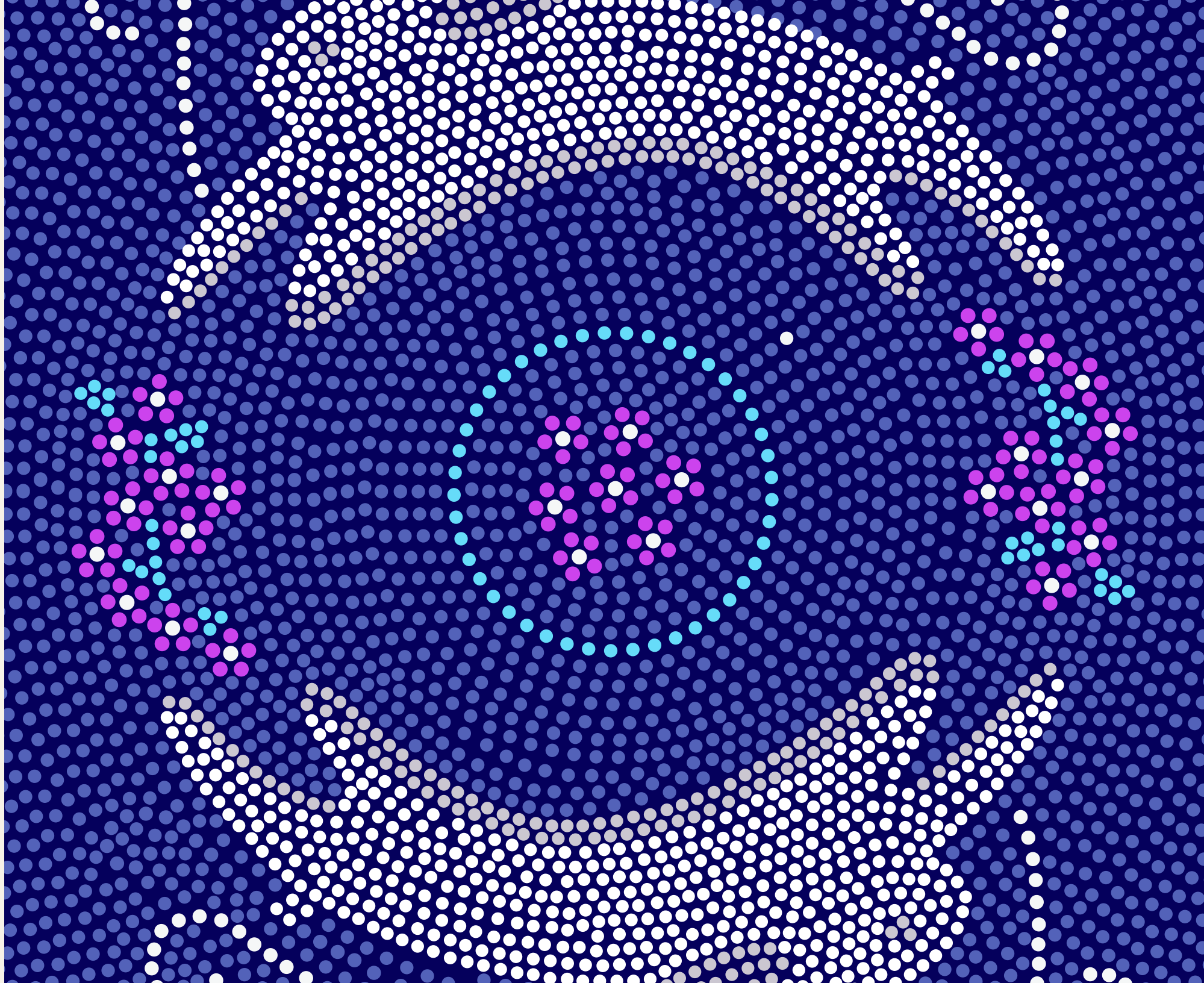
**“Building relationships is important as ever for continuing knowledge to be passed down.”**

— Food Rx Grantee (WNHAC)

Grantees noted a trend of their work increasingly relying on both modern technology and on traditional knowledge and practices, an effective and strategic blending of “old and new.” For example, several teams hosted community sessions with Elders on Zoom to share teachings around traditional harvesting. Additional potential benefits of this practice is the ability to record and preserve valuable knowledge, as well as making these learning and sharing opportunities accessible to community members living elsewhere.



# Phase 3



# Phase 3: Food is Our Medicine Action Learning Series & Land-Based Learning Grants

## Building a deeper understanding with an Action Learning series

While the Food Rx grantees developed and prototyped community-led Indigenous foodways programming in their respective communities and facilities, Nourish recognized the concurrent need for wide-scale shifting of attitudes and narratives within food and health services in public facilities. Guided by the Indigenous and Allies Advisory, the Nourish team sought partners and systems leaders to co-create a national educational **Action Learning series**, designed to introduce health care professionals and leaders to new and different ways of understanding the complex relationships between Indigenous foodways, reconciliation, healing and health care. Nourish fields many requests from health care leaders for Indigenous recipes, but these requests can skip over a critical step: addressing the legacy of colonization and the history of systemic racism that have led to the exclusion of Indigenous foodways and wisdom from health care in Canada to begin with.

## What does the Action Learning series include?

The *Food is Our Medicine* Action Learning series launched in April 2021, and includes a [Learning Journey](#) and a [Digital Resource Library](#). It invites diverse health care staff – such as senior leaders, physicians, nurses, food service directors – to embark on a personal learning journey and reflect on food in health care as a mechanism within a colonial system, and prompting organizational advocacy and action to honour Indigenous food and worldviews in health care. By highlighting Indigenous histories, voices, stories, and ways of knowing, this work honours that our food is our medicine.

1. The **Food is Our Medicine learning journey** was created in response to a gap Nourish found in the resources, practice, and literature related to Indigenous foodways in health care settings. The self-paced learning journey takes participants through four modules and introduces participants to the idea that including traditional foods in health care is not solely the work of nutrition and food service teams, but of the whole hospital or health organization. Nourish aims to have 400 health care professionals representing 100 Canadian health care organizations complete the learning journey by National Indigenous Peoples' Day 2022.
2. The **Digital Resource Library** highlights Indigenous perspectives and amplifies the contributions of Indigenous leaders in medicine and systems change. The Library includes dozens of multimedia resources that users can listen to, watch, or read.

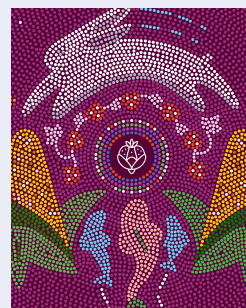
This Action Learning series aims to:

- Build the understanding and narrative that food is our medicine; recognizing and valuing the wisdom in Indigenous foodways and the diversity of practices
- Provide health care leaders with knowledge and tools to decolonize food in health care and use it as an organizational pathway to deepen conversations about systemic racism and reconciliation
- Inspire action, engagement and responsibility around Indigenous Foodways in health care settings



### Meet the collaborators behind *Food is Our Medicine*

Along with health care professionals, Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers across Canada, Nourish partnered with [RallyRally](#), [Briteweb](#) and Indigenous artists, artisans, writers and allies to create *Food is Our Medicine*.



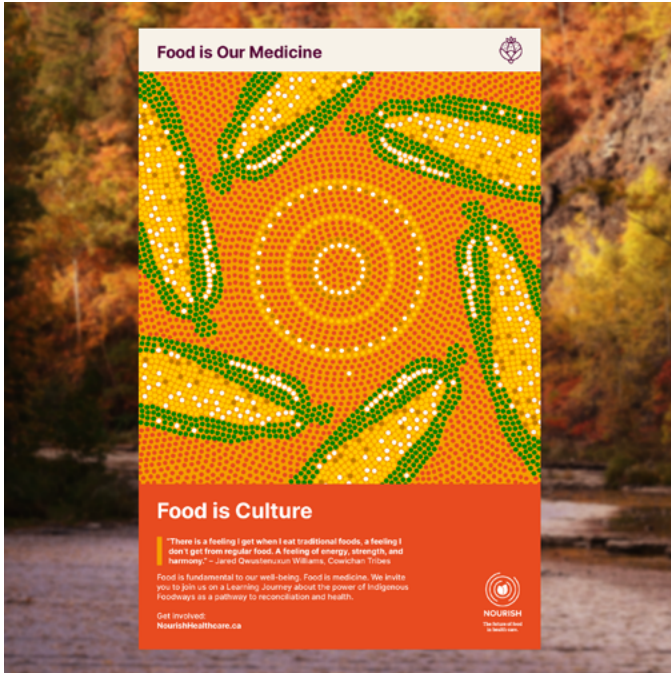
[Mariah Meawasige](#), an Anishinaabekwe/settler from the northern shores of Lake Huron (Genaabajing [Serpent River First Nation] and Elliot Lake) codesigned the 5 illustrations in the FIOM campaign.



[Brittnay Gauthier](#), from Michipicoten First Nation, codesigned and beaded 200 pins by hand. The first 200 learners to complete the learning journey will be gifted a handmade beaded pin.

**Get involved:** [Sign up for the \*Food is Our Medicine\* Action Learning series](#)





**Take a look (downloads):**

Learning Journey:

[Welcome Guide](#)

[Fall](#)

[Winter](#)

[Spring](#)

[Summer](#)

Posters:

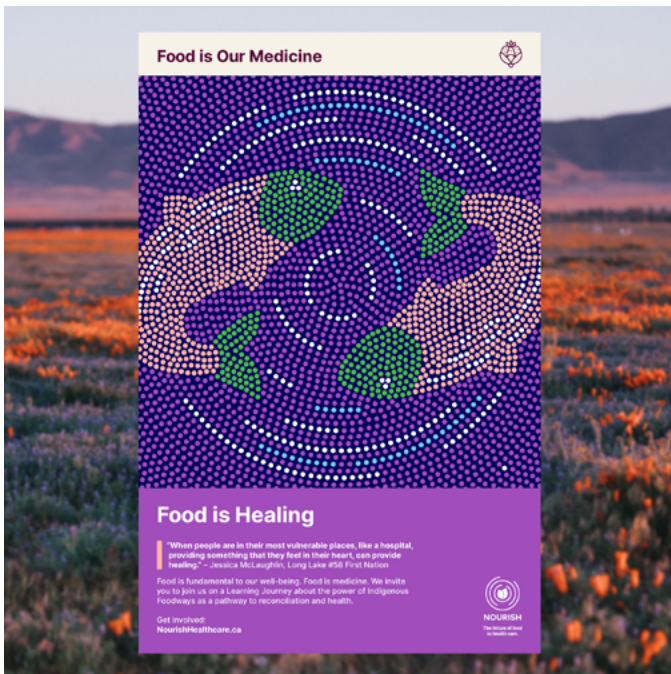
[Main](#)

[Fall](#)

[Winter](#)

[Spring](#)

[Summer](#)



## Impact by the Numbers

To date 254 health care professionals have signed up for the Learning Journey.

323 attendees joined for the launch webinar.

# Key Learnings

1. For too long, health care education, organizations, and practices have omitted and discounted Indigenous knowledge and approaches. This discrimination perpetuates stereotypes and anti-Indigenous racism, and leads to harmful experiences for many Indigenous people. This Action Learning series calls health care professionals and leaders to **address the historical and present day realities of systemic racism in health care and food systems**. Furthermore, it invites learners to personally reflect, and collectively act, to transform the connections between health care and Indigenous foodways. We are learning that Indigenous health should not, and cannot, be a siloed health “program” within organizations. Indigenous knowledge, ways of being, and approaches to health must be acknowledged and included in all aspects of health care planning and delivery for meaningful, transformative systems change.
2. In response to the initial reactions to, and engagement with, the Action Learning series, Nourish recognizes the need to focus next on the **development of Indigenous food policy**. The *Food is Our Medicine* Action Learning series digs into the “what” and “so what” of this work, and Nourish is poised to move into the “now what” that builds upon the years of learning and consultation to inform policy that Indigenous foodways are a critical pathway for healing and reconciliation inside health care
3. The learning journey serves as an entry point, drawing health care leaders into focused self-reflection, encouraging deeper conversations and relationships about systemic racism and reconciliation between settler institutions and Indigenous peoples. There is an identified need for learners to debrief, discuss and co-learn. In response, Nourish will be hosting **seasonal conversation circles** with special guests, between June 2021 and June 2022.
4. The Action Learning series is successfully reaching the target audience of settler health care professionals and leaders, as evidenced by the uptake within hospital and health care organizations and the formation of organizational teams to take the learning journey together. Additionally, the learning journey is resonating with a wider audience, such as Indigenous peoples interested in learning more about their own culture. Not all Indigenous people know about their own culture, mostly due to the ongoing impacts of colonialism and residential school. We are honoured and humbled that this offering is being validated by such a **diversity of learners**.
5. Individuals and teams currently participating in the learning journey are expressing the impact, resonance and value of the teachings and activities. People are sharing openly and honestly about their lack of previous knowledge and understanding, expressing gratitude for this offering, and feeling eager to learn more. Reconciliation is not an easy process, and learning the truth is a challenging, and often disturbing,

first step. Nourish is honoured to **create and hold this space for learning and unlearning, sharing and reflecting**. As the Action Learning series progresses, Nourish is poised to gather and support the momentum and network of learners in a community of practice, aimed at leveraging organizational culture shifts across the country.

## Land-Based Learning Grants

The final steps of this project will be to support land-based learning by the Nourish Anchor Cohort, which consists of seven teams of health care and community leaders working together over 2 years to tackle wicked problems like food insecurity, health inequity, and the climate emergency.

Meet the teams:

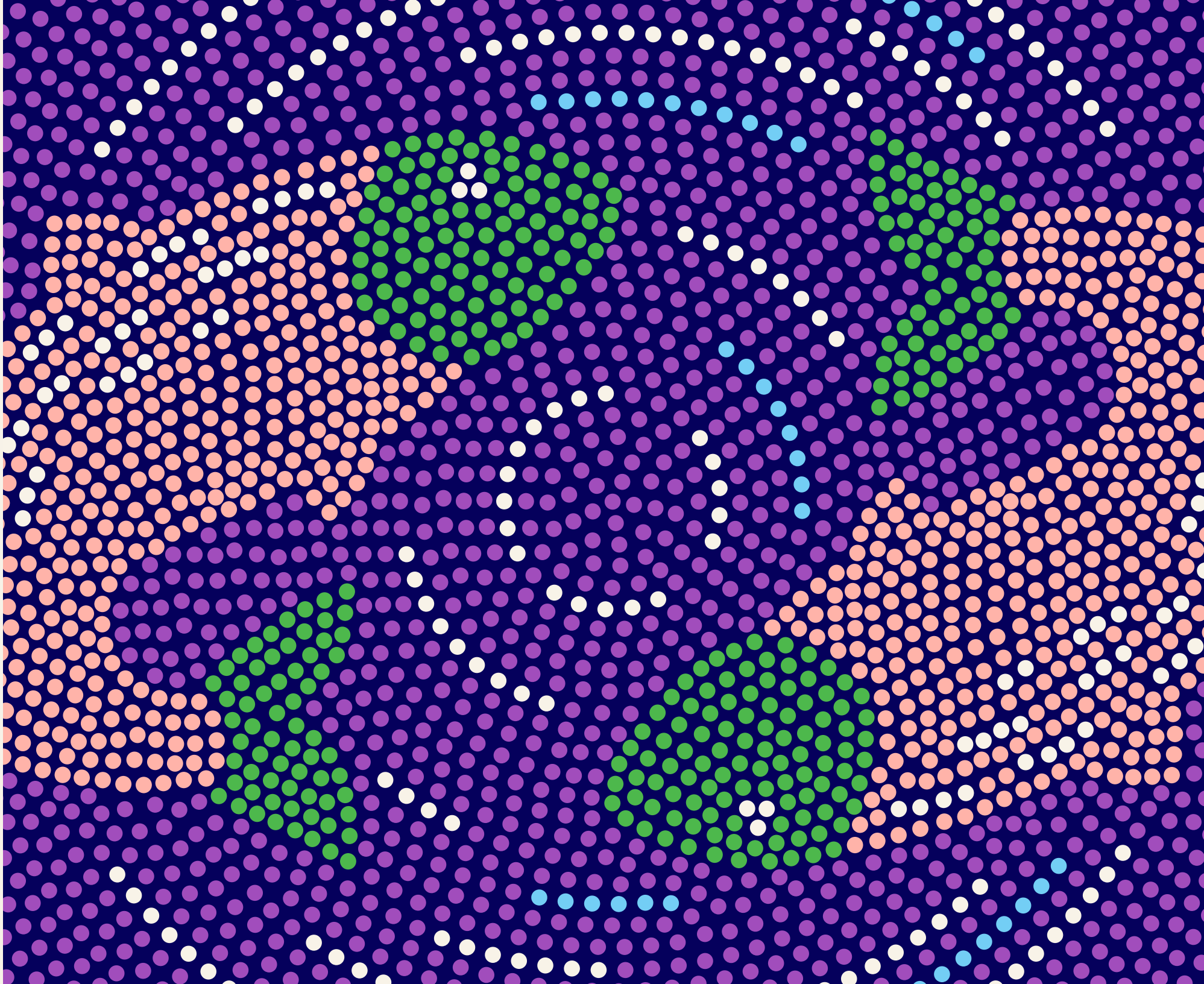
- **Vancouver:** Vancouver General Hospital, UBC Planetary Health Lab, and others
- **Saskatchewan:** Saskatchewan Health Authority & CHEP Good Food
- **Toronto:** Black Creek Community Health Centre & Black Creek Community Farm
- **Northern Ontario:** Northern Ontario School of Medicine & Northern Ontario Indigenous Food Sovereignty Collaborative
- **London:** St. Joseph's Health Care London & ReForest London

- **Montréal:** CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal & Carrefour alimentaire Centre-Sud
- **Labrador:** Labrador-Grenfell Health & Food First NL

Originally, Nourish had envisioned the teams learning together at an in-person kickoff retreat. As waves of the pandemic continued to unfold, a national gathering was not possible. The kickoff retreat shifted to being virtual, and so we have also shifted the land-based learning to be hosted in each team's region.

Each anchor collaborative team can access a **Land-Based Learning Grant (up to \$7k)** to catalyze their relationship-building and learning with Indigenous partners and knowledge keepers. Teams will be invited to co-design a land-based learning engagement with Indigenous partners in their community to access the grant. Between June and September, 2021 teams will come together for learning sessions that centre Indigenous leaders and opportunities for land-based connection in their learning. Teams will be asked to share back through learning circles and storytelling webinars. A supplemental report will be prepared for the Frontline Fund in Fall 2021.





# Call to Action

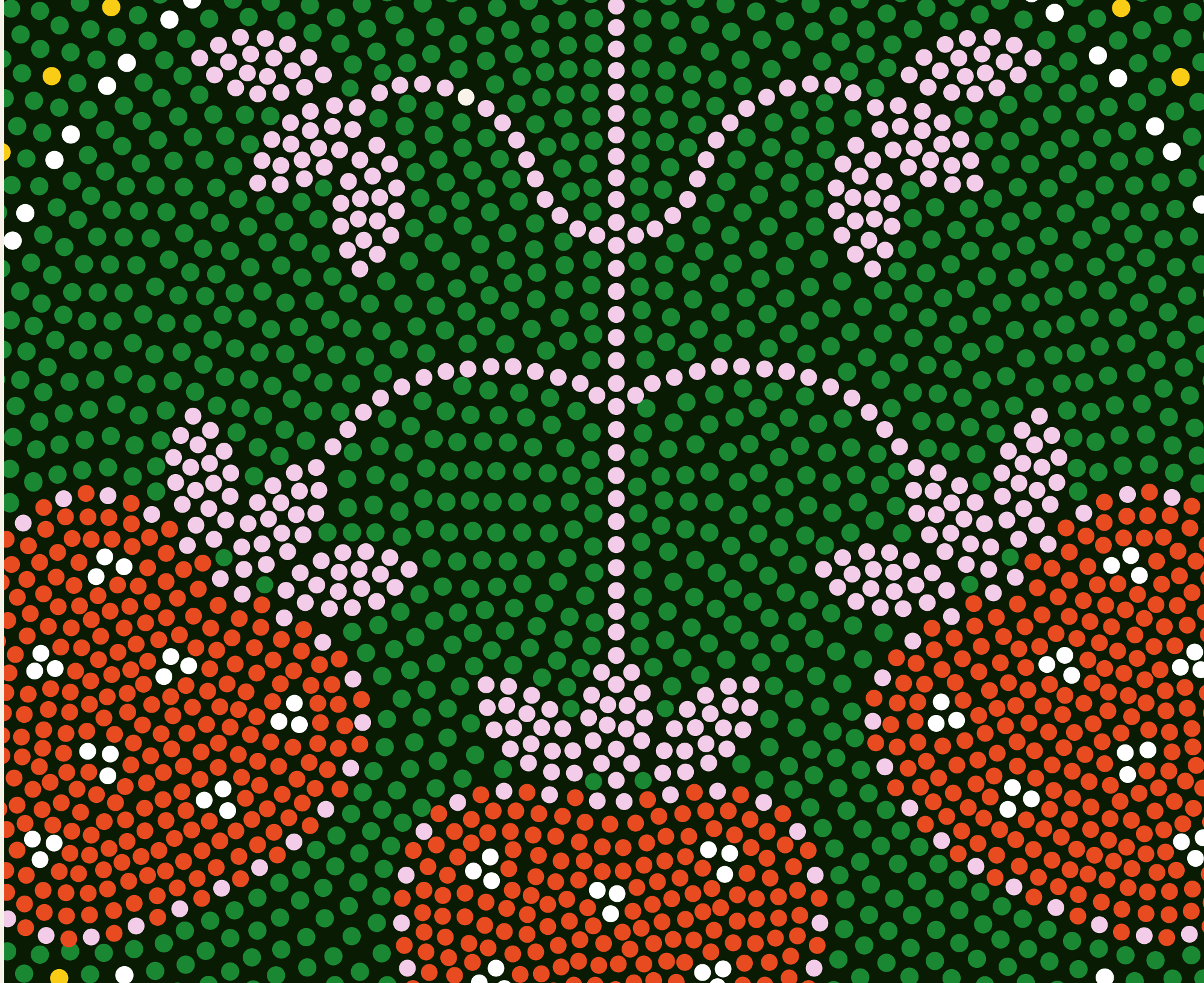
We invite health care professionals to team up with their colleagues to sign up for the *Food is Our Medicine* learning journey. Nourish has set a goal to have 400 health care leaders representing 100 health organizations complete the learning journey by National Indigenous Peoples Day next year, June 21, 2022. We hope that many of the hospitals who came together to create the Frontline Fund will consider participating in the Action Learning series and to actively promote it to their organizational leaders and staff.

We invite health care organizations to host screenings of the short film “Why Hospital Food Matters to Reconciliation” to start or deepen the conversation in Canadian health care organizations committed to tackling systemic racism and embracing the power of Indigenous knowledge and foodways.

[nourishhealthcare.ca](https://nourishhealthcare.ca)



# Acknowledgements



# Acknowledgements

*Food is Our Medicine* emerged as a vision of the Nourish Indigenous & Allies Advisory and was developed by the Nourish team in collaboration with many partners. It is a heart-driven collaboration between many Indigenous and settler leaders, health care professionals, knowledge keepers, and advocates. In addition to all the authors and media-makers whose work is featured in the learning journey and digital resource bundle, we offer our gratitude to all those who contributed their time, energy, perspectives and knowledge:

## **Nourish Indigenous and Allies Advisory**

- Shelly Crack, Northern Health
- Jenny Cross, Haida Knowledge Keeper
- Margaret Edgars, Haida Elder
- Kelly Gordon, Kanyen'keha (Mohawk), Six Nations Health Services
- Tessie Harris, Settler Dietitian and Nourish Innovator
- May Henderson, Métis Elder
- Kathy Loon, Slate Falls First Nation, Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre

- Maurice Mathieu, Métis, Saskatchewan Health Authority
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## **Creative Team**

- [Briteweb](#), Digital Agency
- [RallyRally](#), Design Studio
- [Mariah Meawasige](#), Anishinaabekwe/settler from the northern shores of Lake Huron (Genaabajing [Serpent River First Nation] and Elliot Lake), Designer/Illustrator
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# Chi-miigwech, Nya:wen, Haawa, Mahsi Cho



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