Tungasuvvingat Inuit

MEDIA RELEASE

Bridging the Gap: National Nutrition Month Highlights Need to Address Cancer and Nutrition Gaps for Urban Inuit in Ottawa

Ottawa, ON, March 18, 2026 – As Canada marks National Nutrition Month in March, attention is being drawn to the intersection of food security, cultural identity, health and wellbeing – particularly for Indigenous communities. For Inuit living in urban centres, these challenges are especially pronounced. Ottawa, home to the largest Inuit community outside of Nunavut, is at the frontline for a specialized initiative aimed at addressing the disproportionately high rates of cancer among Inuit which is a critical health crisis.

While Inuit communities face significant health system barriers, cancer represents a particularly urgent concern. Inuit populations experience higher rates of certain cancers, including lung, nasopharyngeal, and colorectal cancers, along with poorer cancer-related outcomes and survival compared to the general population.

Central to this challenge is the disruption of traditional diets. Urbanization has limited access to country foods such as fish, seal, caribou, and aqpik (cloud berries) – which have long supported Inuit wellbeing. The dietary shift towards store-bought and ultra-processed foods has contributed to food insecurity and increased cancer risks for urban Inuit.

In response, Wellspring Cancer Support Foundation, with funding from the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, recently completed the second *Nourish for the Inuit Community* gathering in Ottawa. The winter gathering, held on January 14, brought Inuit community members together to share stories, learn about nourishing foods, and sample culturally appropriate recipes. This program is designed and delivered in partnership with The Ottawa Cancer Foundation and Tungasuvvingat Inuit's Ontario Inuit Cancer Program to address these intersecting needs.

"This work is about caring for our people in a way that reflects who we are," said Sipporah Enuaraq, an Elder involved in the Ottawa-based Inuit advisory group. "When Inuit gather, share food, speak our language, and pass on knowledge, healing happens – not just for the body, but for the spirit."
In addition, culturally appropriate recipes featured in the program are developed with guidance from Inuit culinary expertise, ensuring food reflects Inuit traditions while supporting the needs of people living with cancer in an urban environment.

"Food is central to Inuit identity and resilience," said Moses Koonoo, an Inuk chef who contributes to the program. "Creating recipes and preparing food for this program means honouring our culture while adapting to the realities Inuit face in the city – especially when health is fragile."
The winter gathering is the second of four seasonal events, with the spring gathering scheduled at the end of March. Altogether, the gatherings aim to strengthen community connection, address food insecurity, and ensure Inuit see their culture reflected in cancer support services. Insights from these events will help inform future programming and the potential expansion of Inuit-led cancer support initiatives in Ottawa and beyond.

To learn more about upcoming Inuit food- and cancer-related events in the Ottawa region, visit: https://www.facebook.com/Tlottawa

Tungasuvvingat Inuit's food security team serves over 400 families every other week through the food bank program, providing nutritious food options as well as country food. The food security team has been integral to informing the development of the Nourish project and ensuring that the foods discussed are accessible and affordable.

About Wellspring
Wellspring is a national Canadian charity providing professionally led support programs free of charge to people living with cancer and those who care for them.

About Tungasuvvingat Inuit
Tungasuvvingat Inuit is a provincially incorporated non-profit organization serving Inuit in Ottawa and Toronto through culturally grounded programs that support health, wellbeing, and community connection.

About The Ottawa Cancer Foundation
The Ottawa Cancer Foundation supports initiatives that improve cancer care, outcomes, and access to support across Ottawa.

For media inquiries, please contact:
Suzanne Polyak
Chief Digital and Communications Officer
Wellspring Cancer Support Foundation
403-923-5210 | suzanne@wellspring.ca

For media inquiries, please contact:
Angie Poirier
Director, Communications & Public Relations
The Ottawa Cancer Foundation
613-247-3527 ext 233 | apoirier@ottawacancer.ca

- 30 -

For media inquiries, please contact:
Eleanor Partridge,
Manager, Communications
Tungasuvvingat Inuit
613-299-4684 | epartridge@tiontario.ca