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Environmental Scanning: A Strategic Insight Tool for Planning at Northern Health

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Environmental scanning is an essential, iterative, and ongoing process that positions Northern Health (NH) to understand forces and factors that shape health and impact healthcare across northern British Columbia. A dynamic method, environmental scanning enables NH to anticipate emerging trends, identify risks early, and respond effectively to the evolving needs of northern, rural, and Indigenous communities that call northern BC home. This year, with NH preparing to refresh its Strategic Plan and deepen its alignment with the Quintuple Aim¹, environmental scanning offers a high-level overview of evidence-informed insights necessary to guide sustainable and equitable system transformation including highlighting progress on critical service areas and outlining areas to address for future consideration.

What Is Environmental Scanning?

Environmental scanning can be defined as the systematic collection, monitoring, and analysis of external and internal factors that influence strategic direction and shape service delivery². By examining macro-level, political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental factors, and internal organizational conditions, we can build a more complete and comprehensive picture of current realities and future challenges.

An environmental scan typically encompasses several key domains:

- **Political & Legal Factors**

This includes provincial funding patterns, emerging regulatory requirements, and climate accountability commitments that affect infrastructure planning and operational decision-making.

- **Economic Trends**

This includes inflation, labour market competition, and rising transportation and supply costs that impact capacity to deliver services across a geographically vast region.

- **Social & Demographic Insights**

This includes the unique distribution, health needs, and lived realities of northern, rural, and Indigenous communities that guide planning for equitable, culturally safe services.

- **Technological Developments**

This includes exploring digital innovation, including virtual care, remote monitoring, and data-driven tools, that continue to expand access for remote communities and improve person-centered experience and accessibility.

- **Environmental and Climate Realities**

This includes examining increasing climate-related risks, from extreme weather events to infrastructure vulnerabilities to help anticipate and plan for these pressures while advancing work on climate and environmental sustainability commitments.

- **Internal Organizational Factors**

This includes exploring workforce stability, recruitment and retention pressures, quality improvement initiatives, and organizational readiness for change which influence the ability to advance priority work.

Together, these insights, both external and internal, enable NH to remain reflexive, responsive, forward-looking, and better positioned to respond to a dynamic and evolving healthcare landscape.

Why Environmental Scanning Matters for Northern Health?

Aligning with Strategic Priorities

NH's current strategic plan emphasizes healthy communities, coordinated and accessible services, high-quality care, staff well-being, and the advancement of infrastructure and technology. Environmental scanning ensures that these priorities remain grounded in current evidence and responsive to shifting conditions. Whether it is facing demographic shifts, new technological opportunities, or tightening fiscal constraints, the scan provides insights to guide NH to make evidence-informed and future-oriented decisions.

Supporting Evidence-Informed Decision-Making

Environmental insights guide service planning across the life span, population health initiatives, and investments in digital health solutions. In a region where distance, weather, and resource availability deeply impact health access, informed planning is a non-negotiable. Environmental scanning helps NH anticipate community needs and evaluate where new programs or care models may have the most impact.

Identifying Risks and Emerging Challenges

Northern Health faces persistent risks from workforce shortages, climate-related disruptions, aging infrastructure, and changing population demographics. Environmental scanning enables early detection of challenges, allowing NH to develop mitigation strategies, allocate resources proactively, and respond more effectively during periods of uncertainty.

Driving Innovation and Adaptation

New care models, technologies, and policy developments are continuing to reshape the healthcare landscape. Environmental scanning highlights opportunities for innovation, such as expanding virtual care, further integrating cultural safety frameworks, or adopting new approaches that improve flexibility, reach, and accessibility in rural and remote communities.

Strengthening Organizational Resilience

By understanding how economic, social, and environmental pressures intersect with internal capacity, NH can build a more resilient, sustainable, and responsible health system. This is particularly important as climate events, workforce instability, and supply-chain pressures continue to challenge health service delivery across the region.

Improving Partnerships and Community Engagement

Environmental scanning also reinforces NH's commitment to meaningful engagement. Insights from staff, physicians, communities, and Indigenous partners ensure that NH's

planning processes are grounded in lived realities and reflect local priorities.

Connecting Environmental Scanning to the Quintuple Aim

The **Quintuple Aim**, focused on enhancing person-centered experience, improving population health, supporting fiscal and environmental sustainability, promoting care team well-being, and advancing health equity, serves as a guiding framework for NH's transformation efforts.

Environmental scanning strengthens NH's ability to achieve these aims by:

1. **Enhancing [person-centered experience](#)** through identifying expectations around culturally safe care, digital access, and coordinated navigation.
2. **Improving [population health](#)** by monitoring demographic shifts and social determinants that affect northern communities.
3. **Supporting [cost and environmental stewardship](#)** by tracking fiscal trends and enabling efficient, regionally tailored resource allocation.
4. **Promoting [care team well-being](#)** through the early identification of workforce pressures and opportunities for support.
5. **Advancing [health equity](#)** by highlighting inequities, particularly those affecting Indigenous and underserved and marginalized populations.

Note: Some of the links may not work for external viewers.

How Northern Health Conducts Environmental Scanning

NH uses multiple approaches to gather and interpret data for the environmental scan including:

- 1. Data and Literature**
Review: Demographic, strategy, and accreditation reports, briefing notes, presentations, health systems research, grey literature, and strategic evaluations.
- 2. Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Conversations with staff, physicians, leaders, and other partners provide essential real-world context.
- 3. Analytical Frameworks:** Tools such as PESTLE, SWOT, and the Quintuple Aim support structured analysis and appraisal.
- 4. Continuous Monitoring:** Environmental scanning is embedded in annual planning cycles, operational reporting, and strategic updates.

Conclusion

Environmental scanning is a foundational tool that enables Northern Health to navigate complexity, anticipate emerging risks, and design services that meet the lived realities of northern British Columbia. When integrated within the Quintuple Aim, environmental scanning supports NH in advancing person-centred care, population health, financial and environmental sustainability, care team well-being, and health equity. Through this approach, NH strengthens its mission to provide high-quality, culturally safe care for

northern, rural, and Indigenous communities that call northern BC home.

References

1. Nundy, S., Cooper, L. A., & Mate, K. S. (2022). The quintuple aim for health care improvement: a new imperative to advance health equity. *JAMA*, 327(6), 521-522.
2. Charlton, P., Kean, T., Liu, R. H., Nagel, D. A., Azar, R., Doucet, S., ... & Boulos, L. (2021). Use of environmental scans in health services delivery research: a scoping review. *BMJ Open*, 11(11), e050284.

Help Shape Five Days in May 2026!

Five Days in May (FDIM) is a provincial health-research showcase held each year across British Columbia. It is a collaborative initiative involving regional health authorities—Fraser Health, Interior Health, Island Health, Northern Health—as well as provincial research partners such as the BC SUPPORT Unit and the BC Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research (BC NEIHR).



A month-long program features free, virtual, public events designed to educate, inspire, and strengthen connections between researchers, health-care providers, patients, and community members.

Take a **3-minute survey** and share your ideas: [Five Days in May 2026: tell us what you'd like to hear!](#)

For past recordings, access all content [here](#). For more information, email: KT@northernhealth.ca

NH Library Corner

Many great resources for staff have recently been added to the library's collection. Check out the latest additions:

- [Trissel's stability of compounded formulations](#) - available as an e-book through our Stat!Ref online collection
- [TRANSforming nursing education: infusing gender-sensitive care into healthcare](#) - available as an e-book via EBSCO
- [The 5-minute pediatric consult](#) - this print book is available onsite at the library or can be mailed to regional staff.

All NH staff are eligible to use library services. You can find the library facility in the Learning & Development Centre at UHNBC. Print books can be mailed to regional staff at no cost. If you need assistance accessing any of our digital collections, reach out to library@northernhealth.ca.

Note: Some links are only available to internal NH staff.

Opportunities and Funding

The National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools offers: Custom-Tailored Back-to-Basics Workshops. Refresh your team's foundational evidence-informed decision making

(EIDM) skills in a focused session built around a popular workshop. Workshops will reintroduce key concepts, tools and resources, grounded in real-world context. More information [here](#).

CIHR Team grant: Beyond treatment – advancing cancer survivorship

Advance understanding of the risks and development of toxicities and complications that arise in the extended and permanent phases of cancer survivorship (i.e., after completion of primary cancer treatment) and identify strategies to improve survivorship care in the post-primary treatment phase, in relation to host, lifestyle, environmental, social and other intersectional factors.

- Value: \$400,000 per year for up to five years, for a total of \$2 million per grant.
- Registration deadline: February 24, 2026
- Full application deadline: May 20, 2026

CIHR Healthy Youths team grant

The purpose of this funding opportunity is to support youth-engaged research teams to generate evidence for at least two of the six priorities of [Canada's Youth Policy](#) with the ultimate goal of improving youth health and well-being.

- Value: \$300,000 per year for up to five years, for a total of \$1.5 million per grant
- Registration deadline: April 28, 2026
- Application deadline: June 16, 2026

[CIHR Research excellence, diversity and independence early career transition award 2025](#)

To promote research independence and academic research career readiness of highly qualified trainees, such as post-doctoral researchers, clinicians and PhD-holding research associates, belonging to underrepresented groups.

- Value: \$660,000 for up to six years
- Application deadline: June 16, 2026

Upcoming Events

Feb 25, 2026 at 8 am – 6:30 pm | In-person Vancouver

Access to Innovation – Discovery to Impact: Life Sciences in Action. Information and registration [here](#).

Feb 26, 2026 at 12.30 pm – 2 pm | In-person and Virtual

HRI Seminar. Work, Place and Health: A dialogue on addressing work-related health inequities in the rural and remote communities presented by Dr. Christopher McLeod. Information and Teams link [here](#).

March 3, 2026 at 8:30 am – 4 pm | Virtual

Putting Patients First Conference (PPF) is the annual conference hosted by the BC SUPPORT Unit, part of Michael Smith Health Research BC. PPF 2026 will continue the conversation on “Learning communities” in British Columbia. The conference will explore how bringing diverse groups of people

together to solve a shared health problem — including people with lived and living experience can improve health and health research ecosystems. Info and virtual registration [here](#).

March 4, 2026 at 1 pm – 2:30 pm ET Time | Virtual

Webinar: Moving Towards Stronger Public Health: Supporting the Uptake of Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada. Information and Registration [here](#).

March 4, 2026 at 5 pm | Virtual

Clinical Research Professionals of BC: Embodying Indigenous Approaches in Health Research. Info and registration [here](#).

March 26, 2026 at 1 pm – 2 pm | Virtual

Coordinating Care for Kids: Research Insights to Strengthen Engagement in Care Coordination in Rural Primary Health Care by Dr. Erica Koopmans. Info [here](#).

March 26, 2026 at 12 pm – 2:00 pm | Virtual

UBC Faculty of Medicine: Indigenous Speaker Series presents “Taking Care of Each Other: Métis Perspectives on Culture, Wellness, Belonging & Identity” by Colette Trudeau, Chief Executive Officer, Métis Nation British Columbia. Registration and Info [here](#).

New Approved Research Studies in Northern Health in December and January 2026

NH continues to expand its research supports that contribute to relevant research and scientific discoveries strengthening Northern and provincial research capacity.

#	Principal Investigator	Institution	NH Affiliated Team Member	Study Title	HDSA/ Area	Facilities
1	Pedro Henrique Tavares Queiroz de Almeida	UBC, Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy	N/A	Characterizing Upper Limb Dexterity in Chronic Kidney Disease: A Pilot Study	Prince George	UHNBC Peritoneal, Hemodialysis, and Kidney Care Program clinics
2	Tami Howe	UBC, Audio & Speech Sciences	N/A	The experience of living alone with aphasia post-stroke: A qualitative collective case study	Prince George	N/A
3	Pedro Henrique Tavares Queiroz de Almeida	UBC, Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, UNBC	N/A	Strengthening rural orthotics education for hand and upper limb care: A collaborative initiative in Northern British Columbia	Prince George	Department of Occupational Therapy

4	Catherine Worthington	University of Victoria	N/A	Social Isolation and HIV Care: Identifying Causal Pathways of Social Isolation that Affect Treatment Adherence in Small Urban, Rural and Remote Communities in British Columbia (TIE: Treatment Adherence, Social Isolation, and Engagement)	Smithers, Prince George, Hazelton, Houston	Bulkley Valley District Hospital, Hazelton Community Health, Houston Health Centre, Northern Interior Health Unit, Smithers Community Health, Houston Health Care Centre
5	Pat Camp	UBC, Physical Therapy	N/A	Access to Spirometry Testing in Northern Health: A Geospatial Analysis	All	All
6	Jonathan Loree	BC Cancer	N/A	Validating ctDNA Observation vs. Routine Investigations (VICTORI)	Prince George	N/A
7	Alicia Rahier	UBC, Pharmaceutical Sciences	N/A	Assessing the presence of an evidence-based bundle of care for the treatment of Staphylococcus aureus bacteremia in hospitalized	N/A	N/A

				patients in Northern Health.		
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Recordings and Seminars

- Michael Smith Health Research BC Knowledge Translation Recorded Seminars
[Access the recordings here](#)
- BC Children's Hospital Research Institute Recorded Seminars
[Access the recordings here](#)
- Women's Health Research Institute Recorded Seminars
[Access the recordings here](#)

Interested to share information with us for our April edition?

Contact: KT@northernhealth.ca

To read previous editions of the Newsletter? Access here [earlier editions](#).