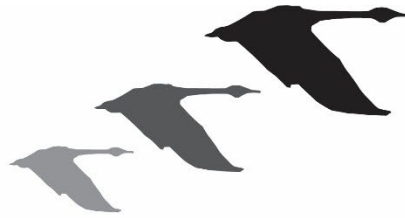


2024-2025 Annual Report

Weeneebayko Area Health Authority



Weeneebayko Area Health Authority

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Mission, Vision, Values

Weeneebayko Area Health Authority (WAHA) provides healthcare services to people living along the western James Bay and Hudson Bay coasts. We get our name from the Cree people in this region who refer to the waterways that make up their traditional territory as Weeneebayko. The majority of people living in the region's coastal communities are of proud Cree lineage.

Our mission

Weeneebayko Area Health Authority is a regional, community-focused organization, committed to providing optimum health care as close to home as possible.

Our vision

Weeneebayko Area Health Authority will distinguish itself as a provider of quality health services with a holistic approach that reflects the distinct needs of all peoples in the Weeneebayko region.

Our values

WAHA is committed to promoting healthier lifestyles while continuing to improve the holistic, lifelong well-being of all.

WAHA supports families and communities through health education, advocacy, and Cree language services.

WAHA is committed to providing high-quality health services that include traditional and cultural healing methods.

WAHA supports Western and Traditional approaches to medicine.

Message from the Board Chair

On behalf of the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority Board of Directors, I am proud to present this year's annual report, a reflection on the hard work, collaboration, and commitment shown across the region to strengthen our healthcare system and support the well-being of our people.

This past year, our Board has continued to provide oversight rooted in accountability, cultural values, and a shared responsibility to serve our communities with compassion and care. We have remained focused on long-term planning, inclusive decision-making, and ensuring the voices of First Nations leadership and patients are reflected in every step forward.

We are especially proud of the progress made on the Redevelopment Project that will see a new regional healthcare campus in Moosonee and ambulatory care centre in Moose Factory. This is an historic project that brings hope for our community members today and future generations. The Redevelopment Project is not only about infrastructure; it is about building trust, restoring balance, and delivering care that is closer to home and grounded in our ways of knowing and healing.

As we reflect on the accomplishments of this fiscal year, we also acknowledge the challenges ahead. But with strong leadership, resilient communities, and partnerships built on respect, we remain confident in the path forward.

To our Elders, youth, staff, and all those who continue to guide and support WAHA—meegwetch. Your strength inspires us.

In unity and gratitude,

Carmen Tozer
Board Chair

Message from the President and CEO

As President and CEO of the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority, it is my honour to share with you the 2024–2025 Annual Report. This past year has been a time of continued progress, reflection, and unwavering commitment to the health and well-being of the people and communities we serve along the James and Hudson Bay coasts.

Guided by our mission and the voices of our patients, community members, Elders, and partners, we have taken significant steps forward in improving access to care, strengthening community partnerships, and advancing health equity for the region. One of the most defining milestones this year has been the community momentum and support behind the Redevelopment Project. It was because of all the support and advocacy from community members and partners that funding was secured for this project—a project rooted in respect, collaboration, and a shared vision for healthier generations to come. Meegwetch for every supportive post on social media, for traveling to Ottawa to have our voices heard, and kind comment.

In the last year, we have also made meaningful strides in recruitment and retention, cultural safety, and community-based care delivery—each a vital part of our long-term transformation strategy. None of this would be possible without the incredible dedication of our staff, physicians, Elders, leadership, and partner organizations.

Together, we are laying the foundation for a stronger, more connected health system that is built by and for the people of the North. I am proud of what we have accomplished and deeply grateful for the trust placed in us as stewards of this important work.

Meegwetch for walking alongside us as we continue this journey—guided by the knowledge of our ancestors and the promise of future generations.

Respectfully,

Lynne Innes
President and CEO

Message from the Chief of Staff

As Chief of Staff for the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority, I am honoured to contribute to this year's annual report and reflect on a year of meaningful progress in delivering patient-centered, culturally safe care across our region.

Over the past year, our clinical teams have continued to demonstrate remarkable resilience, professionalism, and dedication to our patients and communities. We have made significant strides in improving access to care—both through the expansion of local services and through the development of the new regional healthcare campus. The Redevelopment Project will help ensure that more community members can receive high-quality care closer to home, with fewer disruptions to family and community life.

We are also working to strengthen care pathways by supporting recruitment and retention, enhancing training opportunities, and deepening partnerships with academic institutions and regional health networks. Our focus remains on improving outcomes and delivering care that respects the values and traditions of the people we serve.

None of this progress would be possible without the incredible efforts of our frontline staff, physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals. I extend my deepest gratitude to every member of our clinical team, and to the leadership, communities, and partners who continue to support our shared mission.

Together, we are shaping a health system that is more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable—for today and for generations to come.

With respect and thanks,

Dr. Elaine Innes
Chief of Staff

Accomplishments

Executive Office

Lynne Innes wins prestigious provincial award

Weeneebayko Area Health Authority's (WAHA) President and CEO, Lynne Innes was presented with a Premier's Award in the health sciences category for her work to improve the quality of care and access to it in the western James Bay and Hudson Bay region of Ontario.

The Premier's Awards specifically celebrate college graduates who have made significant impacts in strengthening Ontario's economy and local communities.

Chronic Disease Prevention and Wellness Program

In 2024–2025, we launched the Chronic Disease Prevention and Wellness Program to increase access to screening and reduce risk factors linked to chronic illnesses. A new Prevention Care Specialist is leading outreach focused on breast cancer screening, diabetes, heart health, and general wellness.

At events in Moose Factory and Moosonee, our specialist connected directly with over 55 community members through presentations and health booths. We also onboarded Community Health Ambassadors 4 communities—trusted local voices who provide health promotion, education, and system navigation support.

Communications

Website Refresh and Accessibility Improvements

In 2024–2025, WAHA's Communications department led a full refresh of the organization's website to improve functionality, design, and accessibility. A key focus of this work was ensuring the site is fully compliant with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), making it easier for all users—including those with visual, auditory, or mobility-related impairments—to navigate and access important health information. The updated site features a cleaner layout, improved searchability, and better mobile responsiveness, helping patients, families, staff, and partners find the information they need quickly and confidently. This project reflects WAHA's ongoing commitment to inclusive, community-centered communication.

Community Mental Health and Addictions Program

Strengthening Mental Health Services

The department welcomed a new Director in November 2024 who focused on building team capacity and addressing staffing gaps to improve access to care. As of June 2025, key positions have been filled, including a Manager of Clinical Practice, two crisis workers, and an Early Intervention Psychosis worker—all of which will help reduce wait times and enhance mental health service delivery.

In August 2024, the team began planning for the launch of a Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) program. Although staffing constraints delayed implementation this fiscal year, efforts are underway to hire a Nurse Practitioner in 2025–2026 to begin delivering RAAM services in Kashechewan, Attawapiskat, Peawanuck, and Fort Albany.

In partnership with Sinai Health, in-person psychiatry clinics were launched in Attawapiskat and Kashechewan, expanding access to specialized care. Looking ahead, the goal for 2025–2026 is to offer in-person psychiatric services in all communities at least a few times per year, while continuing to provide virtual psychiatry appointments via the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) every Wednesday afternoon.

Dental Services

WAHA Dental achieved several major milestones in 2024–2025. Adult patients returned to the Dental Operating Room (OR) for the first time since the pandemic—marking a major step toward equitable access. We increased the number of coastal clinics, improving access to dental care for patients living in communities north of Moosonee and Moose Factory.

Clinic services also expanded, reducing the need for external referrals. WAHA now offers complex root canals, full dentures, and crown deliveries in-house.

The department welcomed new staff and grew its locum pool, while also launching a research collaboration with the University of Toronto. The study explores cannabis use and oral health among Indigenous populations, building on findings from our Nishtam Niwiipitan (My First Teeth) study.

Clinical Informatics and Digital Health

Digital Transformation – Advancing Care Through MEDITECH Expanse

A major milestone this year was the successful implementation of MEDITECH Expanse, WAHA's next-generation electronic health record (EHR) system. As part of the broader ONE Initiative, this work supports the long-term goal of ensuring every person in northeastern Ontario has a single, unified health record.

The system was rolled out in five structured phases—Build, Test, Training & Readiness, Go-Live & Adoption, and Post-Go-Live Optimization—and launched on schedule with minimal disruption to clinical operations. Within the first month, 95% of clinical documentation had successfully transitioned to the new platform.

Key accomplishments include:

- 98% of staff completed role-specific training prior to launch
- Integration of key services, including Mental Health, the Virtual Walk-In Clinic, and software platforms such as the Electronic Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (eCTAS), and iPeople (back-up system for MEDITECH downtime)
- Implementation of over 25 workflow enhancements based on user feedback

Looking ahead, WAHA will continue to expand the EHR system by onboarding the Kashechewan and Peawanuck Nursing Stations, completing the migration from Practice Solutions Suite (PSS), and integrating Primary Care services into the platform. This work is foundational to build a connected, efficient, and patient-centered health system that meets the needs of all communities across the region.

Indigenous Harm Reduction Program

WAHA's Indigenous Harm Reduction (IHR) Program made considerable progress this year, guided by the voices of community members and a commitment to culturally grounded care. A Regional Harm Reduction Strategy was developed through community engagement sessions with all communities served by WAHA. The strategy reflects local knowledge, lived experiences, and community priorities, and is now being translated into action.

With secured permanent funding, the IHR team expanded to include a Manager, a Regional Facilitator, a Clinical Consultant, and dedicated support staff. Work is also underway on a regional awareness campaign, Healing for One, Healing for All, featuring culturally relevant resources on stigma, Naloxone, and harm reduction.

Other highlights include the Community Sharps Clean-Up Initiative—distributing over 280 sharps kits—and Speaker Series events with the Dr. Peter Centre, focused on Indigenous-led harm reduction and wellness. Collaborations with the Moose River Wellness Group, public health units, and WAHA's Mental Health and Addictions Program continue to strengthen regional partnerships.

Indigenous Primary Care Team

The Indigenous Primary Care Team continued to grow this year, enhancing access to holistic, community-informed care.

The IPCT also conducted a community survey, joined the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, and is preparing to recruit a Midwife to expand prenatal care. An expansion proposal has been submitted to support broader service development and access across the region.

Mamow Ahyamowen

Counting the Path Together

Mamow Ahyamowen, meaning “Everyone’s Voices,” is a regional health data alliance working to improve the well-being of First Nations across northern Ontario. WAHA is proud to be a founding member, supporting community-driven, culturally informed research and data sovereignty.

Over the past year, Mamow Ahyamowen advanced its work on chronic conditions, mental health, and substance use—priority areas identified through the “Learning from Our Ancestors” project. Community co-interpretation gatherings held in July 2024, and February 2025 helped shape the analysis with local knowledge and insight. The team also shared its findings at key forums including the Chiefs of Ontario Data Champion Workshop, Indigenous Services Canada, and the Maamwizing Indigenous Conference. These efforts reflect WAHA’s ongoing commitment to Indigenous-led research and improved health outcomes.

Medical Transportation Services

This year, Medical Transportation Services introduced a dedicated charter flight service in partnership with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) for the Peawanuck community. This Thunder Air service provides reliable access to Moosonee and Timmins for patients needing care, offering four flights per week. The added service improves more timely access to the Kingston Charter for specialty appointments.

In February 2025, a tri-party working group was formed with Ininew Patient Services and ISC to review medical travel policy and ensure non-insured health benefits services remain fair, efficient, and culturally safe.

Request for Proposal (RFP) for a patient transportation charter service to Kingston is in progress.

Minomathasowin

Advancing Community Wellness

Minomathasowin, WAHA's public health and wellness team, remains committed to advancing health and well-being across the Weeneebayko region. Guided by community feedback and data from our partners at ICES and Mamow Ahyamowen, the team continues to align its programs with the evolving priorities of the people we serve.

In 2024–2025, injury prevention remained a key focus. Our team led several safety initiatives across the region, including:

- Boat safety campaigns during the summer of 2024, which included the distribution of 1,700 life jackets
- Bicycle helmet awareness and concussion prevention efforts, with over 700 helmets distributed at local events

To maintain strong partnerships and respond to local health priorities, Minomathasowin hosted three in-person engagement sessions with community Health Directors:

- June and October 2024 sessions focused on strengthening collaboration between WAHA and local health teams through direct updates and shared strategies
- The March 2025 session centered on tuberculosis education and awareness and introduced the possibility of a remote diabetes monitoring initiative

Minomathasowin also supported a wide range of public health promotion efforts behind the scenes. The team helped lead seasonal and culturally relevant messaging on topics such as avian flu prevention, World Sleep Day, holiday health reminders, and oral health education.

People Experience

The Wonder of WAHA – Employer Brand and People Strategy

This year, WAHA proudly launched its Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and employer brand. This initiative celebrates the strengths of our people and helps us attract new talent to support our growing services. The EVP was developed through wide consultation, including focus groups, photo submissions, and one-on-one input from staff across the organization.

The campaign includes an updated careers webpage, digital banners, social media posts, and recruitment toolkits. WAHA's efforts were recognized nationally by being nominated for an Excellence Award nomination from the Canadian HR Awards in the category of Best Employer Branding.

Quality and Risk

This year marked a period of renewal and capacity-building within our Quality & Patient Experience Department. We welcomed a new Vice President of Clinical Excellence and Risk Management, a new Director, and an Interim Manager—along with two Quality Specialists and a Patient Experience Specialist. For the first time, two summer students also joined the team.

We launched the Patient, Family, and Elder Advisory Council with representation from Moose Factory, Moosonee, Fort Albany, and Attawapiskat. The council brings lived experience into planning and decision-making and will hold its first meeting in June 2025, a key step toward deeper community engagement and more inclusive care.

Key Highlights

Medly

Virtual Cardiac Care, Closer to Home

WAHA's partnership with University Health Network (UHN) continued to grow this year, providing high-quality cardiovascular care to nearly 500 community members. In recognition of this collaborative work, the program received the Improved Indigenous Health Award at the 2024 Ontario Health System Quality and Innovation Awards.

This award reflects the shared commitment to delivering culturally safe care, building local capacity, and meeting community needs through in-person and virtual services. The Medly program now includes:

- Regular in-person cardiac clinics across all WAHA communities
- Weekly virtual cardiac clinics exclusively for WAHA patients
- 85 patients supported remotely through the Medly app

In 2024–2025, 147 new patients were referred into the program. Services included 59 echocardiograms delivered in-community and 178 patch Holter monitors used for remote heart rhythm assessment. This model continues to deliver timely, specialized care closer to home while ensuring access to advanced therapies when needed.

Strengthening Our Hearts Through a River of Possibilities

To deepen understanding of heart health from a community perspective, WAHA and UHN hosted sharing circles in Moose Factory and Moosonee. The powerful stories gathered were transformed into an animated short film titled *Strengthening Our Hearts Through a River of Possibilities*. Premiering at the Toronto Short Film Festival in August 2024, the film explores the unique experiences of managing heart health and well-being in the region, set against beautifully illustrated local landscapes.

The film was co-created with Moose Factory artists Rachel (Rae) Corston, Justice Seidel, Greg Spence, and narrator Keifer Hester, in collaboration with biomedical communications students from the University of Toronto and a UHN research team led by Sahr Wali and Anne Simard.

Rivers of Plenty – Supporting Heart Health Through Food Access

Many community members have shared concerns about the challenges of accessing healthy, affordable food. In response, a multi-partner initiative, Rivers of Plenty—was launched to improve food security and support heart health. Partners include Moose Cree First Nation, Weenusk First Nation, Kashechewan Health Services, WAHA, UHN, TRANSFORM HF, the Ted Rogers Centre for Heart Research, and several universities.

The project received a \$100,000 grant from the Connaught Fund’s Community Partnership Research Program. Initial activities included:

- Co-developing culturally relevant health promotion materials
- Hosting gardening workshops and community events
- Conducting surveys on local perspectives on healthy eating
- Using the Nutritious Food Basket tool to assess affordability

Long-term, Rivers of Plenty aims to establish a First Nations-led coalition to address food access and advocate for northern food system reform.

Queen’s–WAHA Education Partnership

Despite challenges in securing government approvals due to the election period, the Queen’s–WAHA Partnership advanced several key initiatives to support health workforce development in the region.

Youth and Community Engagement

The third annual Queen’s–WAHA Student Summer Program was a major success. Sixteen youth from Weenusk First Nation, Fort Albany First Nation, Attawapiskat First Nation, and Moose Cree First Nation participated, along with four Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) students from Delores D. Echum Composite School (DDECS)—a key milestone for local curriculum integration. The hands-on program included a simulated health case study, discussions on mental health, and culturally grounded activities led by four Indigenous and Métis Health Sciences students, who functioned as peer mentors.

In fall 2024 and early 2025, the team visited Fort Albany, Kashechewan, and Peawanuck and participated in regional career fairs. These visits helped build relationships, generate local interest, and lay the foundation for future collaboration.

Team Transitions

Several leadership changes took place this year. Dr. Jane Philpott and Dr. David Taylor transitioned from their roles, with Dr. Roger Pilon stepping in as Executive Lead and Dr.

Jamaica Cass—an Indigenous Primary Care Physician—joining as Partnership Lead in May 2025. The team also welcomed Nathan Cheechoo as Indigenous Student Recruitment Lead and Carinna Pellett to lead community engagement.

Curriculum & Collaboration

Progress on adapting Queen’s programs to better support Indigenous learners continued, including formalizing new curriculum pathways and reducing access barriers. Relationships with Northern College and Omushkego Education deepened, with plans underway for expanded post-secondary pathways and joint initiatives.

WAHA Redevelopment Project

The WAHA Redevelopment Project is one of the most transformative infrastructure initiatives in the region’s history. It includes the construction of:

- A new regional healthcare campus in Moosonee (hospital, Elder Care Lodge, visitor hostel, staff housing)
- A new ambulatory care centre on Moose Factory Island

Key milestones in 2024–2025 included:

- Completion of early site work, including installation of a rail spur for direct delivery of materials
- Federal and provincial funding confirmations
- Awarding a \$1.8B contract to Pomerleau Healthcare Partners on October 3, 2024
- Launch of major construction activities, including foundation piling to ensure long-term stability

At peak, over 400 workers are expected on site, creating meaningful job and training opportunities. Once completed, the new facilities will enhance access to high-quality, culturally safe care and allow more services to be delivered in-region, supporting the health and well-being of patients from across the western James and Hudson Bay coasts.

Weeneebayko Foundation

Supporting Community Wellness

This year marked a new chapter for the Weeneebayko Foundation, with the appointment of Joan Simon as Director and Lee Ann Grattan as Operations Manager. Their leadership will support the Foundation's mission to enhance care beyond government-funded services, focusing on culturally meaningful investments and responsive community outreach.

The Foundation made a major investment in patient transportation, covering half the cost of a second boat to help patients travel from Moosonee to Moose Factory—improving access to care and overall health outcomes.

Looking ahead, the Foundation is preparing to launch the Spirit of Giving Campaign, a new initiative focused on creating culturally safe and inclusive spaces where First Nations patients, staff, and families and Elders feel respected and supported.

As we reflect on the past year, the Foundation remains committed to advancing health equity through community-led, values-driven initiatives that strengthen WAHA and its services for the region.

Strategic Planning

Strategic Plan Development – A Roadmap for the Future

In the summer of 2025, WAHA will launch the development of a new multi-year Strategic Plan to guide the future of healthcare delivery across the western James and Hudson Bay region. This plan will help define organizational priorities, strengthen services, and ensure that WAHA continues to grow in a way that reflects the voices and needs of the communities we serve.

During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, WAHA issued two procurement calls for strategic planning support. The first round did not yield proposals that aligned with the scope and needs of the organization. A second call was issued, and in June 2025, Barnes Management Group was awarded the contract. Their team will support the facilitation, engagement, and development process over the coming months.

The strategic planning process will be built around three core commitments:

- Listening to our communities through meaningful, respectful, and culturally appropriate engagement
- Grounding our priorities in data and lived experience, including insights from partners like Mamow Ahyamowen and internal teams such as Minomathasowin

- Strengthening relationships with First Nations leadership, staff, healthcare partners, and regional collaborators

Engagement and research activities will begin in the months ahead, with a structured planning process that includes internal consultation, data review, and community-based engagement. The resulting plan will provide a clear, actionable roadmap to guide WAHA's decisions, partnerships, and program development well into the future.

We look forward to co-developing this vision together in the year ahead.