



**The First Gathering of the Center for Advancing Rural Health Equity:
Working Together to Improve Health for Rural New England Communities**
November 7, 2022

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

The Center for Advancing Rural Health Equity held its first gathering on an unseasonably warm day on Nov 7, 2022 at Lake Morey Resort in Fairlee, VT. Approximately 150 people came together to learn from one another about health disparities in our region and to participate in meaningful dialogue about how to advance health equity in our communities through partnership and collective action. Across various breakout sessions focused on health challenges, skill building, and partnership, several key themes emerged throughout the day.

1. GRATITUDE Speakers and participants shared a sense of gratitude for the work that has gone into improving health in our rural communities by diverse partners for many years, and for the thought and effort that has brought us to the launch of the Center for Advancing Rural Health Equity. A highlight of the day was an opening acknowledgement of the land and people who came before us:

“This meeting takes place on N’dakinna which translates to ‘our homelands’ that is now called New Hampshire and Vermont. N’dakinna, is the unceded traditional ancestral homelands and waterways of the Pennacook, Abenaki, and Wabanaki Peoples past and present. We acknowledge and honor with gratitude the aki (land), nebi (water), Awan (Air), olakwika (flora), and awaasak (fauna) and the Aln8bak (Human Beings) who continue to stewarded N’dakinna throughout the generations for over 13,000 years.”

– Denise and Paul Pouliot, Head Speakers of the Cowsuck Band of the Penacook-Abenaki People

2. CO-CREATION Co-creation and community engagement are a delicate balance of relationships and partnerships. Community members must define the problems and be an integral force in the development of solutions. We need to consider power imbalances and how power is distributed at every step as we strive to co-create health programs. Authentic inclusion requires hard work to bring in diverse voices and hear from those who voices may be missing. We should continue to strive for equitable partnerships.

“ ‘Hard to reach’ for whom? Meet people where they are.”
– Participant

3. TRUST It is important to understand and to address the systems and structures that have done harm to certain members of our communities. Building trust requires us to commit to goals and then follow through, to come to the table with humility, to communicate openly and honestly, and to forge a pathway for sustainability.

“If you don’t have trust, you don’t have everything.”
– Lisa McBride

4. ACTION We must be action-oriented in our approach. Even while we are working downstream, we should be looking at what needs to be fixed upstream. Honor what exists and build upon community assets. Our actions must be responsive to local needs. Think creatively about the use of data in rural settings--make sure data is understandable and use data in action oriented way.