

# Major Inuit health survey drops anchor in Nunavut

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[CBC News](#)

The largest Inuit health survey ever conducted in Canada has begun in southern Hudson Bay, with doctors and other medical staff travelling across Nunavut aboard an Arctic icebreaker to test and chat with Inuit about their well-being.

The Nunavut Inuit Health Survey, also known as Qanuippitali? — which translates to, "How about us, how are we?" — got underway Tuesday with about 80 people travelling in a "floating health lab" on the Canadian Coast Guard ship Amundsen.

They will visit 19 coastal communities in the territory's Baffin and Kivalliq regions over the next two months.

The research team includes about 40 doctors, nurses, lab technicians and interpreters, and another 40 Canadian coast guard personnel. The researchers are from universities in Quebec, British Columbia and Manitoba.

Land-based crews are moving ahead of the ship to meet with people in the communities and encourage them to take part in the survey.

Participants will be transported to the Amundsen by barge and helicopter for a three-hour health visit, which will involve filling out questionnaires and taking tests for diabetes and stroke.

"We're being greeted by a lot of community support," McGill University Prof. Dr. Grace Egeland, the survey's principal investigator, told CBC News on Tuesday.

"We're looking at chronic disease risk, emergence of diabetes and heart disease, as well as mental health and wellness. And social support, because that brings us resiliency and social capital to help deal with many of the challenges that folks are faced with in their daily lives. So it's really a comprehensive survey."

McGill's Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment is leading the \$8-million project as part of International Polar Year research. It is being funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research, and is also getting federal International Polar Year funding.

The survey team is expected to stop in Sanikiluaq this week, followed by Arviat on Aug. 18. This first phase of their research will run to late September.

McGill is working with six Nunavut organizations and three levels of government in co-ordinating the survey. Over the next two years, it hopes to capture a health snapshot of more than 1,200 Inuit in all of Nunavut's 25 communities.

Egeland, who holds the Canada Research Chair in environment, nutrition and health, said Inuit participants will fill out questionnaires that ask about overcrowding, nutrition and access to food.

## Tests accessible to residents of North

In the health tests, Egeland said individuals will consume a sugar drink and be tested for their diabetes risk. For participants over age 40, medical staff will look at a major artery in their necks to determine their stroke risks.

"These are very special tests that you can't get up in the North, usually," Egeland said. "You have to go south for these tests."

While Egeland said many Nunavummiut and organizations in the territory have shown support for the survey, the land crews still have to assure Inuit that those aboard the Amundsen are nothing like the C.D. Howe medical ship. In the 1950s, the ship gathered about 1,600 Inuit tuberculosis patients and transported them to sanitoriums in southern Canada.

That experience has left bad memories for people living in Nunavut, one crew member said.

"I, for one, was one of those TB survivors, so I understand," said Looee Okalik. "But with acknowledgment we can surpass those feelings, and then participate to the fullest."

Egeland said the results from the health survey should help guide future health-care planning and policy.