

Pure North Client Narratives

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pure North S'Energy Foundation promotes health and wellbeing through the provision of nutritional supplementation and lifestyle advice, with the aim of transforming healthcare, preventing chronic disease, and empowering individuals to achieve and maintain healthy lives.

Pure North captured narrative experiences from **1,483 clients participating in the program** between April 2015 and August 2016 to inform improvement of the service delivery and receive feedback about the program.

The key findings were as follows:

- **Many clients (75-95%) reported improvements in overall health and wellbeing.**

Physical health improvements reported by clients, main improvements included:

- **Increase in energy levels (44%),** such as feeling less tired or fatigue and/or more vitality or stamina
- **Improved musculoskeletal function (12%),** such as less joint and chronic body pain
- **Improved immune function (11%),** such as no or less colds, flus, and/or sickness
- **Improved sleep (9%),** such as sleeping throughout the night and longer, deeper sleep, or awake refreshed
- **Improved cognitive function (8%),** such as mental clarity, less brain fog, or improved concentration or focus

Main mental health improvements reported by clients included:

- **Better mood (18%),** such as less mood swings or improved attitude
- **More optimistic outlook (15%),** such as no negative feelings or higher spirits
- **No or less depression (15%)**
- **Feeling happier (13%),** such as more enthusiasm
- Several clients (5-25%) reported that Pure North helped them to implement lifestyle changes such as being more health conscious, more informed, better understanding, more motivated, and more proactive for following a healthier diet, increasing physical activity, better stress management, and/or other preventative approaches to health.
- **Most clients (50-75%) provided positive impressions of the staff, program, products, and services.**
- A few clients (5-25%) expressed concerns with the program, including: Inconsistencies in service delivery, increased costs; issues with communication and follow-up and maintaining privacy and confidentiality; inefficiencies with administrative processes; issues with location; issues with the products, services, and recommendations.

The findings suggest that participation in the program through taking nutrients, receiving treatments and receiving advice on health management has helped clients to enhance and maintain their health. This also suggests the need for continuity of the Pure North as an innovative and preventative approach to promote and maintain promoting health of vulnerable individuals, such as seniors and those experiencing poor health and homelessness.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Pure North S'Energy Foundation's approach to health is primarily prevention and wellness-focused healthcare, through the provision of nutritional supplementation and lifestyle advice. Pure North is committed to transforming healthcare, preventing chronic disease, and empowering people to feel better, and live longer.

The program serves vulnerable populations including low income seniors, individuals experiencing homelessness, addiction treatment programs, and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations.

The Pure North program provides a personalized approach to optimizing health through the use of nutritional supplements and lifestyle advice. Pure North health care professionals provide individualized care based on blood work, biometric assessments (e.g., blood pressure and body mass index), current prescriptions, and medical history.

The core of the program involves optimizing vitamin D status and providing the necessary vitamins and minerals for overall health. The program provides a specialized high-quality multi-vitamin (Vital 2 Platinum), Omega-3 fatty acids (OptiMega-3), Vitamin B12, Bone Renewal (calcium, magnesium, and vitamin K2), and Cell Protector (antioxidants). Other supplement and lifestyle recommendations are based on individual need.

Purpose

To demonstrate that investing in the health of Albertans will influence quality of life, Pure North measured clients' wellbeing. Further, Pure North gathered clients' experiences from their involvement in the program for informing improvement of service delivery and overall impressions of the program. The report presents the findings from the client narratives.

Pure North S'Energy Foundation contracted Maricon Hidalgo, external research consultant, to synthesize the results from the forms completed by clients.

METHODS

Data Collection

A form was developed by Pure North to capture clients' experiences to specific details about health and involvement with their program. The purpose of the "Client Narratives" (formerly "Story Catchers") was to gather narrative experiences from individuals participating in the Pure

North program to be used to improve program service as well as to gather overall feedback about the program.

Findings present data that was collected between April 2015 and August 2016. The survey was administered to 1487 clients, which asked them to respond to the following:

- Please describe your health prior to joining the Pure North program.
- Please describe how your health has changed since joining the Pure North program.
- Please describe your experience with the Pure North staff.
- Do you have any additional comments?

Data Analysis Procedures

All of the data was entered into Microsoft Word to manage and code data. The responses were first organized by each question, followed by further sorting into broad categories and subcategories, known as themes.

A descriptive scale was used to indicate the approximate number of participants that made the relevant statement, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The descriptive scale for the open-ended responses.

Qualifier	Scale: Percentage of participants expressed a particular opinion or discussed a particular issue
Minority	Less than 5%
A few or several	Between 5% and less than one-quarter
Some	Between one-quarter and less than one-half
Most	Between half and less than three-quarters
Many	Between three-quarters and less than 95%
Majority	All but a minority (i.e., less than 5%)
All	All participants

FINDINGS

The findings present client perspectives on their: (1) health status prior to joining the program, (2) health status during their participation in the program; and (3) impressions of Pure North staff, services, and products (i.e., vitamins and supplements).

Italics font indicates quotes from clients.

Client Health Prior to Joining the Pure North Program

Clients were asked to respond to *“Please describe your health prior to joining Pure North program.”* Of the 1487, a total of 1420 clients responded to this question with a response rate of 95.49%.

Healthy Prior to Joining the Pure North Program

Some clients reported that they were experiencing *“good health,” “healthy,”* or feeling *“good,” “very good,” “pretty good,”* or *“fairly good”* prior to joining Pure North.

Several clients maintained good health prior to joining the program through taking vitamins and supplements, regular physical activity, and/or eating a balanced diet.

“I’ve been very conscious about nutrition for the past 6 years, so my overall health was very good.”

A minority of clients perceived that they were healthy, but testing through Pure North indicated health issues:

“I thought I was great. Turned out I was very anemic. Low Vitamin D. Mercury and lead high.”

“I thought [my health] was excellent and then it was discovered I have celiac. Shocking - that was in July 2015.”

Of those who reported good health prior to the program, several clients reported health issues, mainly clients experiencing issues with low energy, musculoskeletal issues, and mental health issues (Table 2).

Table 2. Clients reporting good health but experiencing health issues prior to joining Pure North program.

Health issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=156)
Low energy	Low energy Tired Fatigue (e.g., unexplained and abnormal fatigue or occasional fatigue) Sluggish Lethargic (during winter)	21.79%

Health issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=156)
Musculoskeletal issues	Arthritic pain (e.g., knee, hip, and/or hand) Injuries (e.g., fractures), stiffness, aches, strain, weakness, and numbness in muscles and throughout body (e.g., hand, arm, shoulder, back, spinal cord, and/or neck) Bad discs in neck	14.74%
Mental health issues	Stress Moodiness: Irritability, anger, low or dark mood Seasonal affect disorder or “winter sadness” Depression (mildly) Anxiety (low anxiety)	8.97%
Poor cardiovascular function	High cholesterol High blood pressure Quadruple heart bypass Taking medication (e.g., blood thinners and Teva-Rosuvastatin)	8.33%
Sleep disturbances	Lack of sleep Trouble sleeping through the night (e.g., lighter sleep, not staying asleep after 5 to 6 hours of sleep, or waking many times throughout the night) Non-restorative sleep	7.05%
Gastrointestinal function	Digestion issues Inconsistent bowel movements Chronic constipation Bloating Pain in lower intestine Stomach discomfort Abdominal pain	7.05%
Immune function	Occasional (once a year) or prone to colds and flus Inflammation issues Multiple sclerosis Celiac disease	6.41%
Headaches or migraines	Odd migraines Occasional (e.g., once a month) or frequent headaches	3.85%
Poor cognitive function	Low memory Brain fog Concussion	3.21%

Health issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=156)
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovering from cancer, cancer diagnosis, or prostate cancer • Overweight or weight gain • Issues with blood sugar levels (e.g., low or high) • Low vitamin D or high ferritin • Asthma, lung infections, or pneumonia • Hypothyroid or thyroid issues managed with medication (e.g., Synthroid) • Tinnitus • Aging • Physical stress indicators • Diabetes • Skin rashes • Oral issues (e.g., burning mouth syndrome) • Cataracts • Poor balance • In an accident 	18.59%

Moderately Healthy Prior to Joining the Pure North Program

A few clients reported that they were moderately healthy prior to joining Pure North, describing their health as “average,” “okay,” “fair,” “not bad,” “mediocre,” or “moderate.”

Of those with average health, some clients were experiencing health issues (Table 3). In particular, clients mainly reported low energy, musculoskeletal issues, mental health issues, poor cardiovascular function, poor gastrointestinal issues, and poor immune function.

Table 3. Clients reporting average health but experiencing health issues prior to joining Pure North program.

Health issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=72)
Low energy	Decreased energy Tired Fatigue (occasional) Sluggish Exhausted and run down	36.11%
Musculoskeletal issues	Osteoarthritis (e.g., knee, hands, and/or joints) and pain Stiffness, degrading mobility in joints Injury Muscle weakness Bone loss Chronic back pain	19.44%
Mental health issues	Mentally not stable Anxiety Depression Stress or better stress management No motivation Irritable	11.11%
Poor cardiovascular function	High blood pressure High cholesterol	6.94%
Poor immune function	Weak immune system More prone to colds and flus Severe colds Frequent tonsillitis	5.56%
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weight gain or overweight • Bloating or digestive issues • Effects of aging • Headaches • Fuzzy thinking • Poor sleep • Cancer treatment (e.g., chemotherapy for breast and non-Hodgkin follicular lymphoma; or radiation therapy for squamous cell carcinoma) • Asthmatic • Skin issues 	20.83%

Poor Health Prior to Joining the Pure North Program

Some clients reported that their physical and/or mental health and wellbeing was poor and experiencing health issues prior to joining Pure North. Some described their health as “poor,” “very poor,” “not good,” “bad,” “declining,” “deteriorating,” or “not healthy.”

Many clients reported health issues, commonly poor energy, mental health issues, and musculoskeletal issues as depicted in Table 4.

I was experiencing a lot of very low mood and mental confusion. I felt lethargic most of the time and found it difficult to generate interest in anything at all.

[My health prior to joining was] poor - I had just completed treatment for breast cancer and gone through a divorce - lupus, Hashimoto's disease and extreme fatigue.

Table 4. Clients reporting poor health and/or health issues prior to joining Pure North program.

Health Issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=1368)
Low energy	Irregular, no, or low energy or vitality Tired, Fatigue, sluggish, lethargic, exhausted, listless, dragging, drained, and/or rundown Chronic fatigue Weakness	30.48%
Mental health issues	Depression (ranging from mild to severe), seasonal affective disorder, postpartum depression Anxiety or anxiety attacks Experiencing stress (e.g., worrying about health, finances, or employment), limited resilience to stressors, or unable to manage stress Low mood or moodiness: mood swings, anger, irritability, annoyed, sad, weepy, unhappy, agitated, feeling down, miserable, hopelessness, or emptiness Poor outlook on life: unmotivated, lack, or no desire, incentive, or enthusiasm to live (e.g., for work or family)	14.55%

Health Issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=1368)
	Addiction issues (e.g., alcoholism, prone to alcohol) Low self-esteem, confidence, or worth (e.g., uselessness) Bipolar Eating disorders (e.g., anorexia) Emotionally overwhelmed Grieving Nervousness or fear	
Musculoskeletal issues	Osteoarthritis (e.g., knee, hip, shoulder, lumbar, hip, and/or hands), body (e.g., back, feet, neck, legs, and/or buttocks), muscle, and/or nerve pain, aches, swollen, stiffness, soreness, weakness, and/or numbness Chronic pain (e.g., lower back or neck pain) Limited mobility (e.g., walking issues) Scoliosis – hip, back, and IT pain Bulging or herniated discs Carpal tunnel Fibromyalgia Sciatica Osteoporosis of the spine, bone loss, or achy bones Planter fasciitis Hip replacement Gout	14.04%
Poor immune function	More susceptible, more frequent (e.g., few times per year to weekly), and slow recovery from colds, flus, infections (e.g., strep throat), and sickness Autoimmune diseases: Rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis, autoimmune hepatitis, or celiac disease High inflammation and frequent flare ups Low platelets and blood cells Enlarged spleen Monoclonal gammopathy	6.14%

Health Issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=1368)
	Lymphoproliferative disorder Low grade lymphoma cells in blood	
Sleep Disturbances	Poor or irregular sleep pattern Insomnia, not sleeping Sleep deprivation (e.g., 3 to 4 hours per night) Difficulty sleeping (e.g., waking up and unable to go back to sleep) Sleeping 11 hours per night or sleeping all the time Sleep apnea	4.75%
Poor cognitive function	Brain fog (e.g., foggy thinking) Mental confusion Memory issues (e.g., poor memory or short-term memory issues) Lack of concentration (e.g., unfocused, low focus, or low clarity of thinking), coordination, and/or comprehension (e.g., reasoning)	4.02%
Cardiovascular/circulatory function	High blood pressure High cholesterol Coronary bypass Heart double bypass Suffered and recovering from heart attack Chest pain Elevated heart rate Circulation issues (e.g., poor blood flow to feet or cold all the time) Recovering from atrial fibrillation and ablation Cardiomyopathy and heart failure Aortic stenosis Erratic A/C valve Low blood pressure Suffered stroke Artery disease Post-aneurysm	3.73%
Weight issues	Overweight Weight gain (e.g., heavier) Morbidly obese	3.14%

Health Issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=1368)
	Weight fluctuations (e.g., up or down) Weight loss	
Gastrointestinal function	Stomach, abdominal, digestion, intestinal, and bowel issues (e.g., aches, pains, or upset) Constipation Bloating Acid reflux Gas Loose stools Bleeding internal hemorrhoids	2.70%
Poor endocrine function	Hormone imbalance High insulin, hyper- and hypoglycemia, or diabetes Pancreatitis Grave's disease Hashimoto disease Painful premenstrual syndrome (PMS) or irregular menstrual cycle Menopausal symptom Food cravings (i.e., sugar, salt, and carbohydrates) or appetite issues (e.g., not satisfied) Body temperature issues (e.g., feeling cold all the time)	2.63%
Respiratory function	Sinus issues (e.g., severe sinuses, sinus headaches) Pneumonia Bronchitis Allergies Asthma Acute dry cough Breathing issues (e.g., on oxygen) Lung infection, surgery, or recovery from surgery	2.19%
Other issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin, mineral, and/or nutrient deficiency: low minerals including vitamin D, D3, B12, and iron; low mineral absorption; or anemia • Headaches (e.g., chronic and severe) 	11.62%

Health Issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=1368)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent (e.g., daily) and severe migraines or cluster migraines • Cancer: Chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL); hairy cell leukemia; low grade lymphoma cells; concern or worry about tumour returning; cancer treatment (e.g., radiation); cancer diagnosis (e.g., breast and prostate cancer); or recovering from cancer • Metal toxicity or high levels of mercury (e.g., amalgams) and/or lead • Oral health issues: tooth abscess; sores on tongue; cavities; no teeth or loss of teeth; jaw disease; decaying teeth; tooth pain; burning in mouth; stained and dirty teeth; or sores on tongue • Poor neurological function: Parkinson’s disease; neuropathy pain; nerve system issues; restless leg syndrome; transient ischemic attack (TIA); balance issues; or seizures; concussion; or post-concussion syndrome • Vision or hearing issues: eyelash duct infection; blurry vision; sore eyes; ringing in ears; temporary blindness; ear infections; or hearing loss • Prostate urogenital issues; bladder pain, infections, or disease; liver inflammation or disease; kidney infections; high uric acid; or gall bladder removal • Hair, nails, and skin issues: rashes, finger nails peeling at tips or brittle nails; frequent outbreaks of eczema; painful scalp; hair loss; acne; skin infections; or rosacea; • Malnutrition • Overuse or side effects of prescription medication • Dizziness 	

Health Issues	Description	Percentage of total health issues reported (n=1368)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lyme disease • Aging process • Nodules in back of head • Shakiness • Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS) • Dehydration • Candida 	

A minority of clients stated that they were not paying attention to their health, eating poorly and no or stopped exercising, and/or not taking vitamins or supplements on a regular basis. They also lacked knowledge or unaware of health issues such as heavy metals toxicity, vitamin deficiency, or food sensitivities.

“Didn't pay attention to proper nutrition and supplementation.”

“I was not aware of the food sensitivities that I had and was not on a regular routine of vitamin and supplement maintenance.”

As well, clients lacked knowledge or unaware of how to manage their health (e.g., diet and physical activity) and/or the importance of vitamins and supplements.

“I was unsure about what vitamins to take, health was not the best, needed more information on a lot of topics.”

Client Health During Participation in Pure North Program

For the first version of the form, clients were asked to respond to *“Please describe how your health has changed since joining the Pure North program.”* Of the 1487, a total of 1426 responded to the question with a response rate of 95.90%.

Clients were asked in the second version of the form *“Have you noticed any changes in your health since being on the program?”* Of the 253, a total of 246 clients responded to this question with a response rate of 97.23%.

No Change in Health

A minority of clients indicated that they were new to the program (coming for second visit for recommendations), it was still too early, or uncertain of observed changes to their health at that time in the program.

“Just in amalgam removal stages. Too early to determine.”

“I am not sure if it has improved, but it hasn't got any worse.”

Of those, some clients reported experiencing health issues or circumstances such as cracked bones, sleep disturbances, cardiovascular issues (e.g., atrial fibrillation and ventricular ejection fraction) or undergoing surgery.

“Its rather hard to say as I had a fall in July 2014 and cracked my femur. It is healing hardly at all but I do have energy for the day's work and could have energy for probably think that it is due to the extra vitamins.”

Contrarily, several of new clients reported slight improvements in energy, sleep, and improvements in gastrointestinal functioning.

A minority of clients reported that they observed “no,” “none,” “no change,” “no noticeable change,” or “same” health as before joining Pure North. Although they have not noticed any changes, several stated that the program was helpful for maintaining their good health or confident that the program will improve their health.

“My health has always been very good with very few complaints. I'm sure the program has helped to keep up my strength as my age continues to climb to 80 years.”

Changes in Health

“The loving environment, the blood and etc. with all of the vitamins and minerals with better diet, wholesome fresh foods, etc., have definitely improved my physical, mental and social life especially my marriage... My whole outlook on life has greatly improved.”

Many clients reported changes in physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellbeing since joining the program. Some indicated improvements in health, describing it as “improved,” “better,” “good,” “very good,” “healthy,” or “sense of wellbeing.”

“I have a stability physically not experienced in decades. I am stronger spiritually now (my will to live). This is actually amazing in light of my living day to day is now worse than ever before.”

Many observed improvements in their physical and mental health and wellbeing. Some stated experiencing improvements in their physical health, specifically improvements in energy levels, musculoskeletal, immune, and cognitive function, and bloodwork (Table 5).

Table 5. Clients reporting improvements in physical health in the Pure North program.

Improvements	Description	Percentage of total improvements reported (n=1161)
Energy	A little bit, some, Improved, or more energy, vitality, or stamina for exercise and/or daily activities Less tired or fatigue Less chronic fatigue	43.65%
Musculoskeletal function	No or less osteoarthritis (e.g., knee, wrists, hands, or feet), body (e.g., back, shoulder, ankle, or leg), muscle and nerve pain, inflammation, stiffness, aches, swelling or soreness Improved tennis elbow or tendonitis in wrist Increased muscle strength (e.g., hands) and tone Better control of sciatica Increased bone density and strength Improved balance Increased mobility Improved range of shoulder motion Less shakiness in hands Less leg twitching, cramps, and tenderness Improved fibromyalgia Improved gout symptoms (in months) Less restless leg	11.58%
Immune function	No or less frequency and/or faster recovery from colds, flus, viruses, sickness, or seasonal illness Improved white blood cell count Reduced inflammation Reduced severity and/or flare ups of rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, or lupus nephritis	10.89%

Improvements	Description	Percentage of total improvements reported (n=1161)
Sleep patterns	<p>Sleeping throughout the night and longer duration (8 to 12 hours)</p> <p>Deeper sleep</p> <p>Waking up less during sleep</p> <p>Falling asleep faster</p> <p>Awake refreshed</p>	8.64%
Cognitive function	<p>Mental clarity</p> <p>No or less confusion and brain fog</p> <p>Cognitive strength</p> <p>Better concentration and focus</p> <p>improved memory</p> <p>Increased coordination</p> <p>Read without losing track</p> <p>Improved reading comprehension</p> <p>More mental alertness</p>	8.22%
Blood work	<p>Improved mineral absorption</p> <p>Normal or increased levels of vitamin B12, D, omega 3 and 6, or calcium</p> <p>Elimination or lower levels of heavy metals (e.g., mercury and lead)</p>	5.88%
Stable weight	<p>Weight loss (between 5 and 174 pounds)</p> <p>Less weight fluctuations</p> <p>Lower BMI</p>	4.84%
Gastrointestinal function	<p>No or less constipation</p> <p>Bloating resolved</p> <p>Better digestion</p> <p>No more intestine pain</p> <p>Improved gut health</p> <p>Improved IBS symptoms</p> <p>Less gassy</p> <p>Improved bowel movements</p> <p>Helped with stomach aches</p>	4.24%
Other improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endocrine function: improved thyroid function; balanced hormonal levels (e.g., less sugar or salt cravings; or insulin); treatment for Hashimoto disease; improved appetite (e.g., eating more); 	13.66%

Improvements	Description	Percentage of total improvements reported (n=1161)
	<p>improved diabetes (e.g., no longer diabetic); or balanced or normal blood glucose levels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiovascular function: improved circulation, regulation of body temperature, improved Raynaud’s syndrome symptoms, and no chest pain • Respiratory function: Improvements with sinuses, asthma, chronic cough, breathing, no or less frequency of pneumonia, off oxygen • Liver function (e.g., treatment for hepatitis C) • No or less bladder infections • Improved hair and nail, including less hair loss; hair, finger and toe nails are stronger and grow faster, nails no longer peel and crack; clearer skin; reduced rosacea flare ups; rashes disappearing and healing • Improved oral health: mouth (e.g., tongue) sores healed, less tooth pain, cleaner and stronger teeth • No or less frequency of headaches and migraines • No more seizures • Less restless leg 	

Several clients observed improvements, more balanced, or “*stabilized*” mental health, in particular, reporting improved mood, more positive outlook, improved depression, and feeling happier (Table 6).

“Seems to be more level - mood, energy and general well-being. I am not experiencing any negative feelings. Seems like I feel pretty smooth all the time.”

Table 6. Clients reporting improvements in mental health in the Pure North program.

Improvements	Description	Percentage of total improvements reported (n=184)
Mood	Better, stable, or balanced moods and emotion Improved mood swings or not as moody Increased attitude	18.28%
Positive Outlook	Optimism Positive mindset or outlook No negative feelings Higher spirits More hope New lease on life More pleasure about life	15.38%
Depression	No or less depression Fewer episodes of depression Shorter duration of depression Depression under control Improved postpartum depression Seasonal affective disorder or winter blues	14.52%
Happier	Happiness or happy More enthusiastic, joy, or cheerful Upbeat Less sadness or down	13.19%
Stress	Decrease or not as stressed Stress levels under control Improved coping skills or stress management Solution-oriented for stress reduction	9.68%
Anxiety	Less anxiety Not as anxious	9.68%
Calmer	Calm Peaceful, at peace, or peace of mind More relaxed	5.98%
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved or balanced mental health • Improved confidence or self-esteem • Less dependence or in recovery from addiction issues (e.g., abstinence from alcohol) • No or less irritability 	6.04%

Of those who reported improvements in health, a minority of clients were experiencing new or existing health issues (Table 7).

Table 7. Clients with good health but experiencing health issues in the Pure North program.

Health issues	Description
Musculoskeletal	Joint aches and pain (but less frequently) in elbow, knees, and/or feet Osteoarthritis in hip or knees Back pain Chronic pain (but intensity less severe) in back (fluid on side nerves in lower back) Loosing muscle strength Fibromyalgia Deterioration of body strength when standing and pain Transverse myelitis
Low energy	Tired (but less and not exhausted) Still tired often Low energy (but improved) Low motivation
Cognitive function	Poor memory Brain fog
Immune function	Sick from colds and flus Rheumatoid arthritis Inflammation Poor immune system, but illness severity much better
Gastrointestinal issues	Constipation and change in stool consistency Bloating Paraesophageal hernia
Sleep disturbances	Issues sleeping through the night (deep sleep) Sleep deprived Insomnia
Poor neurological function	Neuropathy Tremors (i.e., hand shakiness)
Mental health	Stress Depression Mood changes
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dizziness • Prostate urogenital • Candida • Issues with iron storage

Health issues	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sore eyes • High or fluctuations in blood pressure • Migraines or headaches • Weight fluctuations • Sugar cravings • Side effects from treatment (e.g., nausea and fatigue from chelation) or medication (statin) • Issues tolerating supplements • Type II diabetes • Chest issue • Cold sores

Implementing Lifestyle Changes

A few stated that since joining Pure North, clients started implementing lifestyle changes. Of those, most were more *“health conscience”* or aware, informed, and/or motivated to make lifestyle changes. In particular, some had increased awareness, knowledge, and understanding on proper nutrition (e.g., better food choices and increasing water consumption), physical activity (e.g., increasing heart rate during exercise), stress management, and/or other preventative approaches.

Several were also more aware, informed, and/or gained a better understanding of their health status or issues through bloodwork and biometric testing and monitoring offered through the program, such as:

- Mineral and heavy metal toxicity levels
- High blood pressure
- Food sensitivities or allergies (e.g., gluten and dairy)
- Thyroid issues

Further, a minority of clients were aware of the importance of taking vitamins and supplements as well as which ones to take to enhance and maintain health.

Most clients reported that they were more *“proactive”* or *“consistent”* with implementing lifestyle changes. Several were more active or increasing their level of physical activity, including:

- Cardiovascular activity

- Swimming
- Weight lifting
- Walking

Similarly, several clients were eating healthier such as:

- Consuming more fruits, vegetables, and protein.
- Increasing water intake or hydration.
- More balanced and structured diet.
- Managing sugar intake.

A minority of clients reported other changes in lifestyle, including:

- Quit smoking.
- Reduction in alcohol consumption.
- Better stress management and self-care.

“I have lost 60 pounds - from 250 pounds and I'm now less than 190 pounds. I'm jogging and doing weights, squats, etc. I was told I could never do those things again.”

“With Pure North supplements (which I have been taking consistently for 3.5 years) I am feeling confident that I am getting a comprehensive supplement program. I am also consistently trying to eat more veggies and fruit, more organic foods and less processed.”

“More structure with self-care tasks and general improvement in most health measures.”

Factors Improving Health

“I am fortunate to enjoy excellent health and independence. I feel Pure North has contributed to my good health and fortune.”

Several clients reported factors that helped to enhance their health. Many of those indicated that Pure North was a factor that improved their health. Some clients indicated that vitamins (e.g., B-complex, C, D, magnesium, iodine, omega-3, alpha lipoic acid - nitric oxide, etc.), and supplements (e.g., Vitality packs, green juice boost, or probiotics) provided through the program helped with the following improvements:

- Energy
- Sleep
- Restless leg
- Mental health (e.g., anxiety or depression)
- Bone health
- Boost immune system
- Prevent and recovery for flu, colds, and sickness (e.g., meningitis) symptoms
- Memory
- Gastrointestinal function (e.g., relief of constipation or improve digestion)
- Regulate thyroid

Several clients reported that treatment services through Pure North were helpful to identify and address health issues such as:

- Extensive bloodwork and biometric testing to identify health issues.
- Tennant treatments helped with stiffness and pain.
- Dental services such as removal of amalgams reduced levels of heavy metals, improve stomach pains, increase energy, and no more migraine headache. Root canals helped to increase energy.
- Chelation reduce metal levels (e.g., mercury and lead).

Further, several indicated that support from Pure North professionals and adapting diet was helpful for improving health:

- Naturopath to deal with postpartum depression.
- Elimination diet (e.g., gluten free diet) have helped with weight loss, improve gastrointestinal issues (e.g., less gassy with no eggs).

Other factors that helped to improve health for a minority of clients included:

- Surgery to remove cancer (e.g., prostate).
- Medication (e.g., Lyrica) for treatment of neuropathy and hepatitis C.
- Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine for sleep.
- Physio and massage therapy for pain.
- Changes in work situation (e.g., no more shift work or retirement).
- Physical activity to improve depression and weight loss.

Experiencing Health Issues

A minority of clients reported “worse”, diagnosed, experiencing new, and/or still experiencing health issues, displayed in Table 8.

Table 8. Clients reporting physical and mental health issues in Pure North program.

Health issues	Description
Musculoskeletal disorders	Osteoarthritis (e.g., knee) Joint aches and pains (e.g., knee) Sciatica Osteoporosis Stiffness Pain (but not as bad) Gout Inflammation of trochanter
Gastrointestinal issues	Acid reflux Bloating Diarrhea from salmonella poisoning for 6 weeks Barrett’s esophagus and hiatus hernia
Low energy	Tired

Health issues	Description
	Lethargic Fatigue (some)
Cancer	Throat cancer Chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (Waldenstrom macroglobulinemia)
Poor cognitive function	Poor memory Brain fog
Sleep disturbances	Not sleeping throughout the night Sleeping 3-4 hours per night
Poor cardiovascular function	Heart issues High blood pressure Atrial fibrillation Ventricular ejection fraction
Poor neurological function	Paralysis (from hospitalization) Bell's palsy
Mental health	Stress (e.g., financial)
Poor immune function	Increased frequency of sickness from colds and flus
Other	Dizziness Aging: not as active or agile Thinning hair Bronchitis and persistent cough

Factors that a minority of clients identified as contributing to their health issues, include:

- Stress and depression from financial situation (tiredness)
- Feeling stress due to life circumstances (e.g., spouse experiencing health issues)
- Old age
- Car accidents
- Vitamins/supplements (high blood pressure)

Client Experience with the Pure North Program

Clients were asked the following to determine experience with the Pure North program:

- *"How would you describe your experience with Pure North staff?"*
- *"Do you have any additional comments?"*

Of the 1488 who responded to the questions, 1448 (97.31% response rate) and 942 (65.39% response rate), respectively. For the latter question, 197 (19.32%) provided no additional comments.

Generally, clients endorsed Pure North staff, program, products (i.e., vitamins and supplements), and services.

Impressions of Pure North Staff

Of the clients who provided a response in regards to their experience with the Pure North staff, the majority provided a positive impression describing their appreciation and gratitude for the staff.

“The Staff has been excellent. This program has been interesting and made me more aware of what I can do to improve my health. I think it has helped me to be more proactive. Pure North has been a true partner in my road to an improved lifestyle. I never feel rushed out the door and my questions are always thoughtfully considered and answered with care.”

Clients regarded the Pure North staff as going above and beyond in their care and services describing their experience with staff as “excellent,” “great,” “good,” “very good,” “awesome,” “fantastic,” or “amazing.”

Clients also responded to the question regarding their experience with the Pure North staff by highlighting a number of positive attributes (Table 9). Clients described the staff members as friendly, helpful, caring, genuine, respectful, informative and knowledgeable, and good communicators. They also described the care as efficient and professional.

Table 9. Positive attributes of Pure North staff reported by clients.

Positive attributes of staff	Examples
Friendly, genuine, nice, kind, personable, respectful, or courteous	<i>“The staff is exceptional. Always friendly, kind, very tender hearted and give encouragement so you feel better.”</i>
	<i>“The doctors/naturopaths take time to explain our results thoroughly. They listen and are genuinely wanting us to have optimum health.”</i>
	<i>“The Staff is nice and very kind.”</i>
	<i>“Everyone has exhibited only the most respectful attitudes and made me feel very accepted in the Pure North Program.”</i>

Positive attributes of staff

Examples

Helpful, supportive, or encouraging

“Excellent experiences with the Staff at Pure North. Everyone has been friendly and helpful.”

“The Pure North Staff has been consistently kind, encouraging and supportive of me regaining my health. Their doctors are top notch specialists in their field and I greatly value the privilege of consulting with them.”

Informative, knowledgeable, informed, or competent

“I've never had such a supportive and informative experience with health professionals. I always learn something, feel like my questions and concerns are truly being heard, and I'm offered more solutions and resources than I anticipated.”

“Everyone is knowledgeable, competent and helpful.”

“The Pure North Staff is great and well informed.”

Professional

“The Staff has all been knowledgeable and professional. I appreciated not feeling judged about how poorly I was taking care of myself, instead I felt well supported in helping me change my lifestyle.”

Caring, concerned, sympathetic, compassionate, or understanding

“Everyone at Pure North has been very welcoming and nice. They clearly genuinely care for my wellbeing and what they're doing.”

“Amazing support and care. Such compassionate staff and extremely knowledgeable doctors.”

“Awesome staff, friendly, understanding.”

Effective, efficient, organized, or punctual

“The service is really satisfactory. The Staff is perfect and super effective.”

Positive attributes of staff	Examples
Good communicators	<p><i>“Everyone is so nice, the service is very efficient! I always receive replies very fast which is helpful.”</i></p> <p><i>“Excellent always polite, organized, efficient.”</i></p> <p><i>“Good experience - The Staff is friendly and helpful. The services are always on time.”</i></p>
Flexible or accommodating	<p><i>“I very much appreciate the time the Staff takes to explain the program and supplements and listens to the patients' concerns.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very comprehensive with easy to understand instructions.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have found the Staff very friendly and knowledgeable and also flexible in moving appointments around.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very helpful Staff and doctors. Always accommodating.”</i></p>
Attentive or dedicated	<p><i>“The experience has been very good. Prompt clear information. Attentive and courteous Staff.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very dedicated to provide services and supplement products on a daily basis.”</i></p>

Of the clients who provided a response with regards to their experience with the Pure North staff, there were also a minority provided concerns or negative interactions with the staff.

“The Staff is often disorganized in terms of calling several times for forms already received and not prepared for purpose of visit.”

“Front desk can be slow to acknowledge visitors when they enter from the elevator. Perhaps because of the height of the counter and screens.”

“Do have issue with the dentist that was dealing with me. I do not feel respected by the dentist that I was dealing with.”

“Positive... sometimes slight rudeness when collecting supplements.”

“... somewhat abrupt (on the phone).”

Impressions of Pure North Program, Products, and Services

Of the clients who responded to *“Do you have any additional comments?”*, many (84.76%)¹ affirmed that Pure North is a *“great,” “worthwhile,” “excellent,” and “wonderful”* program and expressed their *“gratitude”* and *“appreciation”* for the program, products, services, and founder of Pure North, Allan Markin. They also indicated they were *“happy,” “pleased,” “glad,”* and *“lucky”* to be part of and would like to continue participating in the program.

Clients articulated that Pure North is important and valuable program and service for seniors and the community, in which the level of care and support is not provided in the current health care setting.

Table 10. Positive impressions of Pure North program, products, and services reported by clients.

Positive aspects of the program	Examples
Opportunity to receive help, care, advice, and support to identify health issues (e.g., celiac disease) and monitor health	<p><i>“Gave me reassurance to continue with supplements and “good” advice.”</i></p> <p><i>“Keep up the good work. Always get real good advice and basic knowledge.”</i></p> <p><i>“I appreciate the chance to review my vitamin intake. I always took supplements but I did it on my own and probably not the best idea as it was never monitored so I feel more secure with my program having the monitoring regularly.”</i></p> <p><i>“I love the fact that they take blood and check for any abnormalities as a base line. I appreciate the medical consultations provided.”</i></p>

¹ Total number of clients excluded no comments.

Positive aspects of the program

Examples

"I really like the fact that the supplements are pure and that they are combined with blood work."

"I really appreciate the advice and support I have received to help me do everything possible to look after myself and my physical and mental health."

"Thank you for listening to me. I truly felt heard when describing my issues with my health."

"I appreciate the time taken to explain results and reasons for the different supplements."

Access and availability of affordable vitamins, supplements (e.g., probiotics), and health services (e.g., dental, tennant clinic)

"The program has allowed me to have access to vitamins that I could not afford due to low income."

"Tennant is awesome and provides relief fast."

"I can't adequately express my gratitude for the work of Pure North. I could never have accessed the supplements and dental care I've received without your subsidy program. It's made an enormous difference to my health. Thank you!!"

Promoting and maintaining health and wellness and enhancing quality of life

"Thank you for giving back my life."

"I am very grateful for the opportunity I was given by this program to make such positive life changes to my physical, mental and spiritual wellness."

"I am truly grateful for this help I have received from Pure North to give me the boost I needed to carry on my life. I am doing better now at age 73 than I was in my 40's. Thank you so much."

Positive aspects of the program

Examples

Important role and commitment of the program to an innovative and preventative approach to health

“Pure North services should be the standard in health care rather than an alternative option. It is what one hopes for in health care and seldom finds.”

“I think Pure North makes a magnificent contribution to preventative medicine and the wellbeing of Albertans. It is an exemplary initiative that provides care for the most vulnerable of people.”

“This is a valuable program for seniors to help with quality of life enhancement and preventative health care issues.”

“I am very impressed to have an opportunity to experience such high technology and state of the art health innovations.”

“Great community asset.”

“The biggest or most significant observation I can make is that I have a real health partner now. It is not my doctor who hardly listens to me. It is Pure North.”

“Pure North has been a main support in my return to good health and change in healthy life style. This is a resource I would not be able to provide on my own or receive from traditional health care. Many thanks.”

A minority of clients would or have recommended the program to others, including family members (e.g., spouse and children), friends, and to individuals who want to improve their health.

I would recommend this program to anyone. I've told my family and friends. My husband has joined Pure North. Thank you so very much!!

I recommend these vitamins to ladies and people that have some problems with energy...

I would recommend this service as effective and cost efficient.

Several clients expressed concerns with the Pure North program, impacting the quality of services. Inconsistencies with the program and communication and follow-up, cost of the program, inefficiencies in process, and issues with vitamins, supplements, services, and recommendations are concerns reported by clients (Table 11).

Table 11. Examples of concerns or issues with Pure North program, services, and product reported by clients.

Concerns or issues	Examples
Inconsistencies (e.g., disorganization) and frequent changes to program and recommendations	<p><i>“Sometimes seems inconsistent with level of treatment.”</i></p> <p><i>“The program changes give some uncertainty about the direction of Pure North.”</i></p> <p><i>“Services have been diminished since being on newly introduced payment plans i.e., gold, platinum, etc. Not good for my specific needs as before!”</i></p> <p><i>“[D]oesn't seem to be a good, organized client care system or process (confusion on appointment information and follow-ups).”</i></p> <p><i>“I am occasionally confused by the program changes and answers to questions about services are not always consistent.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am puzzled that since the program has changed that the recommendations for supplements and number of additional packs have changed a lot.”</i></p> <p><i>“The continuity of doctors would be helpful. It seems I've seen a different doctor every time I've been here. While they are all very competent it would be better for continuity to have the same doctor from time to time.”</i></p>

Concerns or issues

Examples

High costs of the program (i.e., vitamins, treatments, and services), especially for middle class, seniors, retirees, and those on limited income

"Please find funding because I'm on AISH (with high rent) and cannot otherwise participate."

"I only wish I could afford to continue in the program. Due to personal financial constraints as a retiree I am unable to continue further after today."

"Being a [two]-year member I noticed that prices have gone up a little which may make me rethink my rejoining."

Issues with communication and follow up

"Asked for results of blood work for the first time. Received some not all. The lady offered to email which I have not received. This is the cause of my visit today. Was told today may not receive email right away - long list to email people."

"Changed my appointment without asking me. Called the day before to tell me. Have called in to pick up Vitality packs and when I arrived no record of my call."

"Vitamin packs change frequently. An email about changes would be positive."

"Program a bit confusing at times. Should have explanations of certain treatments and why I need them."

"Communication between doctors/nurses and reception has room for improvement."

"Follow through - be more thorough please."

"Would appreciate follow-up on testing and blood collection."

Issues with location and convenience of program and services offered

"Great problem for out of province."

"It would nice if your offices were not downtown and easier to get to."

Concerns or issues

Examples

"I don't work downtown so it's hard for me to pick up supplements during work hours. Either after hours pick up or give more supplements each time."

"My wife and I both work with CNRL with [Monday to Thursday] schedule. It would be better if clinic is set up for Friday instead of Thursday."

"Parking needs improvement."

"It would be more efficient if blood work is done here at the shelter."

"Miss the staff visiting the GVFBS depots."

Inefficient process of information gathering and paperwork and maintaining privacy and confidentiality

"Perhaps better recorded information. Not always accurate. Also seeing the same practitioner might help to correct this issue."

"Could be more organized. Need to ask for the information you're told in the consultation."

"I find the extensive questionnaires and repeating of them tiring and repetitive."

"Form filling repeating same information each time ([Alberta] Health [number], [date of birth] - is this necessary)"

"Cut out so many forms to fill out. Things don't change much that a person can evaluate so precisely."

"Questionnaires require some re-working for clarity and less confusion."

"Combine the continuing roll-over of doctors, etc. with the repeated and repeated and repeated regathering of information and

Concerns or issues

Examples

	<p><i>recording it in handwriting and you are spending a lot of money and giving us ongoing conflicting advice. There should be a way of reporting issues other than emailing the receptionist."</i></p> <p><i>"I found it extremely uncomfortable discussing my health/hearing someone else's health information in the cubicles. I think health concerns are private and should be discussed in a more private location."</i></p>
<p>Issues with vitamins, supplements, services, and recommendations</p>	<p><i>"Packets all taste and smell fishy."</i></p> <p><i>"What exactly are all these different pills for[?] Can it be condensed to one multi-pill?"</i></p> <p><i>"I had trouble with the Vital 2 Platinum and had to quit it. It made me nauseous."</i></p> <p><i>"Some confusion when we started as to what vitamins were to be supplied - Magnesium recommended but we were not given chance to pick it up here. Not enough discussion about when or how to take the pills."</i></p> <p><i>"Give me more vitamin packages because I have to take two a day."</i></p> <p><i>"Supplements freely supplied when not necessary - supplies didn't seem to be monitored or regulated."</i></p> <p><i>"There is still a lot of controversy about the high Vitamin D levels recommended. That concerns me somewhat but I still adhere to the program."</i></p> <p><i>"Please get license to sell vitamins."</i></p> <p><i>"Dental clinic unorganized and chaotic. Do not trust."</i></p>

Concerns or issues

Examples

"I was disappointed with the dental appointment and cost estimate."

"Providing recommendations based on six months to a year-old bloodwork does not seem like an effective system for making vitamin program recommendations."

"Is it normal to receive a large bruise after getting a blood test??"

"I am disappointed that the doctors did not take seriously the high TSH on the first blood test. I should have been put on NDT right away and saved the following decline of health as it affected adrenal function and subsequent hormone imbalance. A referral to True Balance would have been helpful at that time."

A few clients were looking forward to participating in the program or provided other input. Clients expressed interest in having more information, advice, and/or receiving treatments (e.g., tennant, green laser treatment, adding probiotics to Vitality pack) to address their health issues including:

- Enlarged prostate
- Acid reflux
- Hearing
- Tinnitus
- Blood pressure
- Allergies
- Weight
- Memory
- Dry skin
- Getting off sugar

"I would like to have the range of treatments available through Pure North to be communicated more fully so choices could be made about what other services I might purchase."

Clients also interested in the program offering more information or additional services:

- Program on the effects of sugar on the body.
- Informational sessions on cardiovascular issues.
- Referrals to other health care professionals (e.g., other specialists).
- Availability of counselling or counsellors for mental issues available.

- Sending results to family physician.
- Additional testing with blood work (e.g., cholesterol).
- Providing water during appointments.
- Completing root canals.
- A chart listing protein foods to clients and the DI kitchen staff.

Finally, they provided the following suggestions:

- More awareness of Pure North.
- Expanding the program to other communities (e.g., Frog Lake First Nations Reserve) and other individuals.
- Including peer-reviewed research to support opinions and decisions made by Pure North health care staff.
- Improving financial and regular payment withdrawals and email receipts regularly (i.e., instead of follow-up from client every two months).

DISCUSSION

Summary

The “Client Narratives” captured perspectives on their health status prior and during participation in the Pure North program along with their impressions with the staff, program, products, and services.

Some clients reported enjoyed good health prior to joining Pure North, while others experienced poor health. Clients reported struggling with physical health issues such as lower levels of energy (e.g., tired, fatigue, sluggish, and/or feeling weak); joint (e.g., osteoarthritis), body (e.g., chronic back pain), or muscle pain, aches, stiffness, and/or poor mobility. Several also reported challenges with mental health including depression, anxiety, irritability, and/or stress.

During participation in Pure North, many clients experienced improvements in physical and mental health and wellbeing. Specifically, the most reported physical health improvement was increase in energy levels (e.g., less tired or fatigue; and/or more vitality or stamina), followed by improvements in sleep patterns (e.g., sleeping through the night; deeper sleep; or awake refreshed), musculoskeletal (e.g., less joint and chronic body pain), immune (e.g., no or less colds, flus, and/or sickness), and cognitive (e.g., mental clarity; less brain fog; or improved concentration or focus) function.

Main mental health improvements in mood (e.g., less mood swings or improved attitude), more optimistic outlook (e.g., no negative feelings or higher spirits), no or less depression, and feeling happier.

Since joining the program, several clients reported implementing lifestyle changes such as more awareness, more knowledge, better understanding, and more motivation for eating healthier, increasing physical activity, better stress management and self-care, and other preventative approaches to health.

Most clients provided positive impressions of the staff, program, products, and services. They expressed their appreciation and gratitude for: access to affordable vitamins, supplements, and treatment services; receiving services to identify health issues and monitor their health; promoting and maintaining their health and wellness and enhancing quality of life; and the program's innovative and preventative approach to health.

Several clients expressed their concerns with the program, including: inconsistencies in service delivery; the increased costs; issues with communication and follow-up; inefficiencies with administrative processes; issues with location and convenience of program; and issues with the products, services, and recommendations.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that participation in the program through taking vitamins and supplements, receiving treatments, and receiving advice on management of health has helped clients to enhance and maintain their health. This also suggests that clients had great satisfaction with the Pure North program. Finally, the findings suggest the need for continuity of the program as an innovative and preventative approach for promoting and maintaining health of vulnerable individuals, such as seniors and those experiencing poor health and homelessness.