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***ILLIAP PAANGANIK QAUJISARNIQ:***  
**One step closer to raising awareness about cervical cancer prevention and HPV vaccination in Nunavik**

**Kuujuuaq, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024** – A Canadian Institutes of Health (CIHR) initiative in collaboration with the Ungava Tulattavik Health Center (UTHC) and the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS) officially launched *Illiap Paanganik Qaujisarniq*, a participatory community-based project tailored to improving cervical cancer screening services for Inuit women in Nunavik, guided by best practices as prioritized by members of the community.

Along with many other countries, Canada is gradually shifting from traditional Pap tests to human papillomavirus (HPV) testing as the primary cervical cancer screening strategy. *Illiap Paanganik Qaujisarniq* will introduce HPV testing as the primary screening strategy in Kuujuuaq, with the possibility of including another community over the next year, as an alternative to the current cervical cancer screening program in Nunavik.

To ensure community-specific implementation strategies, an advisory committee has overseen and directed the project steps through the development of a participative and collaborative approach. Current effort is to increase community awareness on the importance of Cervical Cancer screening while providing culturally adapted information regarding women's health.

## Overview on HPV Infection

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV), transmitted sexually or through direct contact with infected mucous membranes. The incidence of cervical cancer is disproportionately higher in aboriginal communities, including Nunavik, than in the general population.

The traditional method for cervical cancer screening is the Pap test, an analysis of cells taken from the cervix and spread on a slide to detect the presence of abnormal cells. Another cervical cancer screening option is the HPV test, a molecular test that detects the virus' nucleic acids in a genital swab. Quebec recently signalled its intention to go ahead with the implementation of HPV testing as a primary screening test for cervical cancer, due to the improved sensitivity of HPV testing, certain organizational advantages associated with its use (such as self-sampling), and in response to anticipated changes caused by vaccination (reduced incidence of HPV infections).

We therefore initiated, in collaboration with the community, the gradual implementation of HPV testing in Nunavik in order to reach in particular under-screened women who can benefit from the self-testing method. The project began in July 2022 in Kuujuaq and will continue until 2025.

“Through community-led collaboration, our goal is to increase participation in cervical cancer (CC) screening in Nunavik by raising awareness of the importance of CC screening in women as they age, and by implementing a pilot screening program that is based on HPV self-sampling. To do so, we want to evaluate the effectiveness of self-sampling for integration into existing public health and clinical service systems in Nunavik.”

- Dr. Paul Brassard, Public Health and Preventive Medicine physician, McGill University

### About the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Service:

The Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services is a public agency created in 1978 under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. It is responsible for nearly the entire Quebec territory located north of the 55th parallel in terms of the provision of health and social services for the inhabitants of the 14 communities.

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**Source:** Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS)

**For information:** Yentl Béliard-Joseph  
Communication Coordinator, NRBHSS  
Tel.: 438.969.0554