



# Promoting Healthy Choices

*Front cover, clockwise from upper left: Dividing a bowhead whale in Gambell. Rose Kowchee of Nome uses a berry comb to gather blackberries at Nook (Peggy Fagerstrom). Health aide Lydia Jackson treats McKenzie Sagoonick, 5, in Shaktoolik. Kyle Clark, Bryan Muktoyuk and Jens Irelan of the King Island Dancers perform the Raven Dance. Dorothy Sherman, formerly of Teller, pulls a pike from beneath the ice near Mary's Igloo (Peggy Fagerstrom).*

Norton Sound Health Corporation, based in Nome, Alaska, was founded in 1970 to serve the health care needs of the Inupiat, Siberian Yupik, and Yup'ik people of the Bering Strait region of north-west Alaska.

A non-profit consortium of 20 tribes, NSHC was one of the first Native health organizations in the country to assume complete responsibility for medical care of the people it serves. Our board of directors is composed of consumers, most chosen by the 20 tribal governments in the region.

The Bering Strait region is a 44,000-square-mile area that extends to the Russian border in the Bering Sea. The coastal areas are flat arctic tundra and permafrost with some foothills. About 81 percent of the region's 9,200 people are Alaska Natives.

NSHC operates Norton Sound Regional Hospital in Nome, the hub city of the region with 3,500 residents. We also operate clinics in 15 Native Alaskan villages scattered on the coast and islands of the Bering Sea.

Few jobs are available in the villages. Many people continue to lead a traditional subsistence lifestyle, supplementing hunting, fishing and gathering with seasonal or part-time employment.

Central to the mission of NSHC is promoting healthy choices within our communities.

Alaska Natives had successfully adapted, over thousands of years, to surviving in the harsh environment of this region when Russian and then American traders, whalers and settlers reached the area, bringing alcohol, tobacco and processed foods. Today, snowmachines and 4-wheelers have replaced walking for many people. All these factors have affected the health of people here.

NSHC is not just about treating existing health problems. We heavily promote healthy choices, including active lifestyles, maintenance of a traditional Native diet, and a reduction in addictive behavior. Our vision includes improving the health of our people while building a strong, effective indigenous organization.