

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS ADVISORY COUNCIL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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Question 5: What is the single most important recommendation Council could make to ensure that Indigenous ways of knowing and wise practice is incorporated into the recovery approach for Alberta?

Short Response

Engaging only in accountable practices. These, which should be grounded in the Truth & Reconciliation Commission Report, include provider knowledge, role clarity, diversity in approaches, culturally appropriate treatment, Indigenous healing methods, and Alberta Health Leadership.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Grounding

All recommendations must consider the 2015 findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report and need to be concrete, action-oriented recommendations to improve addiction and mental health services to the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations in Alberta. Specifically, recommendations must:

- Respect the rights and dignity of Indigenous Peoples by acknowledging the social injustice of over a century of Canadian policies aimed at the eradication of Indigenous culture and peoples through residential schooling and forced adoption initiatives, among others, and the impact that those policies have had both directly and inter-generationally on the mental health of Indigenous Peoples.
- Support care that is grounded in appropriate cultural understandings that include Indigenous concepts of self, Indigenous concepts of health and illness, Indigenous views of family, and Indigenous cultural values. In addition, we must welcome research that identifies culture and tradition as aspects of empowerment and treatment.
- All addiction and mental health funded services must engage in the essential cultural safety and cultural competence training required to reflect on cultural values, implicit biases, and ethnocentrism that dominates the field, in order to engage in these relationships with true integrity.
- All addiction and mental health assessments and treatment must demonstrate respect for the social structures of Indigenous communities in Canada that have evolved since time immemorial. Approaches to assessment and treatment must be normed or validated in partnership with Indigenous populations. Assessments that do not acknowledge or draw from Indigenous epistemologies have caused unnecessary disruption to already marginalized family and community structures.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Providers

- All providers of addiction and mental health services need to embrace familiarity with Indigenous culture.
- Communicate with clients in culturally appropriate terms.
- Providers unaware of the historical and intergenerational trauma and social and historical context in which pathology arises, or who lack an understanding of Indigenous concepts of self or health are at risk of traumatizing Indigenous clients.
- In addition to general Indigenous cultural allyship, which gives a broader perspective regarding Indigenous knowledge and history, it is important to have localized knowledge regarding each community's unique views of distress or mental health. General cultural literacy is necessary but not sufficient.

Role Clarity

- Providers need to view themselves as facilitators and supporters of the healing wisdom and knowledge that is already present in Indigenous communities.
- Be aware of the important role of culture in healing and be well versed in how to appropriately empower people in their pursuit of reclaiming their culture, including language and ceremony.
- In providing treatment, have a more collaborative and less directive approach.

Diversity in Approaches

- Providers of interventions should be prepared to include the family and community in treatment.
- Consider assisting community members in delivering traditional interventions.
- Recognize the relevance of land-based interventions and reconnection with the land in addressing issues of cultural and individual identity.
- Recognize that at times the involvement of an Elder or traditional healer may be more appropriate and more helpful

Culturally Appropriate Treatment

- Treatment with Indigenous Peoples should adopt a holistic approach, recognizing the importance of realms of the medicine wheel and the importance of collectivism,

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

connection to the environment, spirituality, and community for the mental health of Indigenous Peoples.

- Incorporate and validate these understandings into services for working with Indigenous Peoples.
- Be familiar with culturally appropriate treatment modalities, such as Aboriginal focusing-oriented therapy, which emphasizes the core values of each community, respects local traditions and the value of non-interference.
- Appropriate conceptualization should focus on finding solutions or bringing help and relief rather than labelling, diagnosing, or judging. Furthermore, conceptualization should be contextualized in community.
- Approaches should be collaborative and represent the more collectivistic social structure favoured by many Indigenous clients.
- Case conceptualization should be considered in the context of colonization, necessarily including an understanding of the intergenerational effects of damaging historical events and injustices to the people of this land.

Indigenous Healing Methods

- Fund Indigenous healing methods and recognize these methods as valid forms of treatment.
- Consider the implications of current privacy legislation, which may be overly constrained and not helpful in some communities that would prefer community leadership to have greater access to treatment data.

Alberta Health's Role

- Provide mandated training on the impacts of colonial history, as well as other relevant wellness concepts, such as cultural continuity, two-eyed seeing, Mino-pimatisiwin, and decolonizing research.
- Ensure that only culturally appropriate and culturally safe addiction or mental health research is conducted, following appropriate ethical guidelines, such as the Canadian Institutes for Health Research Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples.

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**Our mission is to advance the science-based profession of psychology
and to promote the well-being and potential of all Albertans.**

PAA collaborates with government, health care, and stakeholders in advocating for science-based public policies such as these recommendations specific to cannabis legislation in Alberta.