



## **Prairie Research Centre: An Exploration of Addictions Recovery among Aboriginal Peoples who utilize the Friendship Centre in Saskatoon: A Holistic Approach to Healing**

### **KEY FINDINGS**

This study reveals that Aboriginal Friendship Centres are seen as a place of community and have the ability to assist in addictions recovery. Many respondents stated that cultural, spiritual, or traditional programs are necessary, and need to be offered at the Friendship Centre level to assist in recovery.

Addictions recovery is a community responsibility and a holistic approach is needed

Participants identified social inclusion at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre as an important factor in the addictions recovery process, with a strong focus on ceremony, culture, family and a sense of belonging.

Findings suggest that there is a need for increased support for local, regional, and national governments for urban services utilized by the Aboriginal communities. More specifically, Friendship Centres require access to resources to increase their ability to provide these essential services, like cultural and traditional programming.

Healing factors mentioned by participants were having children, family support, counselling, having a sense of belonging to a community, such as an Aboriginal Friendship Centre, traditional teachings, sweat lodge ceremonies, spirituality, and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Research demonstrates that there is some strong linkages that need to be further examined between incarceration rates and addictions treatment.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Addictions is a major issue concerning governance in Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan, and in Canada at large. This project worked with Aboriginal Friendship

Centres in Saskatchewan to identify the needs of improving access to addictions recovery programming. Recovering from addictions can be a complex undertaking and studies suggest that many treatment programs are not as effective or successful at creating or maintaining addictions recovery. This project aims to provide recommendations that will assist in the development of policy concerning urban Aboriginal addictions and recovery services and programs.

This research brief is to provide the key findings from the project titled, *An Exploration of Addictions Recovery among Aboriginal Peoples who utilize the Friendship Centre in Saskatoon: A Holistic Approach to Healing*. Researchers and community members worked closely with the urban Aboriginal community of Saskatoon to look at addictions recovery and also related issues to one's well being such as impoverishment, food shortages, homelessness, and the higher rates of Aboriginal incarceration.

## **PARTNERSHIP**

Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan

University of Saskatchewan

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is qualitative in nature and highlights the factors critical to a developing addictions recovery interpretation through the stories of Aboriginal clients who use the services of the Friendship Centre. The research methodology used was in open-ended interview format, case study, and narrative. The sample consisted of eleven participants who identified as Aboriginal clients that utilized the Friendship Centre in Saskatoon. The interviews with the participants provided the data and the analysis of this study, the research questions and objectives asked the following:

- What are the most important factors that lead to addictions recovery from the perspective of Aboriginal people who utilize the Friendship Centre?
- What do Aboriginal clients who utilize the Friendship Centre identify as factors that lead to addictions recovery?
- What do Aboriginal people who utilize the Friendship Centre perceive as barriers to healing from addictions?
- What do Aboriginal clients who utilize the Friendship Centre perceive that needs to be done to promote addictions recovery?

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

Literature indicated that there are many factors that contribute to the addictions recovery process and that many gaps remain when looking at what makes addictions recovery programs and services successful or not.

Through the analysis of the data collected from the interviews the following themes were identified that further explore the addictions recovery process from an Aboriginal perspective. Culture and community were key themes that were brought forward from the participants.

- Aboriginal Friendship Centres are seen as a place for community and have the ability to assist in addictions recovery
  - Children and family are factors in decisions by individuals to enter recovery and begin a sober lifestyle
  - Spirituality and ceremonies are seen as important factors in individual recovery process
  - Traditional Healing circles should be offered at Friendship Centres as an effort to increase recovery and healing in our community
  - Connection to a community is an important factor in going to a Friendship Centre
  - Access to cultural programs and counselling are gaps in programming at the Friendship Centre in Saskatoon
  - Meals and food programs are seen as an important program to the community
  - Alcoholics Anonymous meetings do assist in the recovery process.

Thematic factors that led participants to relapse were identified as stress, the sudden death of a loved one, incarcerations, a breakup and association with chemically addicted friends. Other factors such as the history of residential school and the intergenerational effects were identified. Participants identified social inclusion at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre was an important factor in the addictions recovery process, with a strong focus on ceremony and culture.

The healing factors mentioned by participants were having children, family support, counselling, having a sense of belonging to a community, such as an Aboriginal Friendship Centre, traditional teachings, sweat lodge ceremonies, spirituality, and Alcoholics Anonymous.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the literature review revealed that many current addictions programs are not very effective or successful. This study demonstrated what is needed to ensure success when looking at urban Aboriginal addictions recovery.

Research demonstrates that there are some strong linkages that need to be further examined between incarceration rates and addictions treatment. Yes, reducing Aboriginal addictions is extremely important in sustaining a healthy and flourishing Canadian society for a few different reasons. Aboriginal Friendship Centres are seen as a place for community and have the ability to assist in addictions recovery.

Many respondents stated that cultural, spiritual, or traditional programs are necessary, and need to be offered at the Friendship Centre level to assist in recovery. Addictions recovery

is a community responsibility and a holistic approach is needed. A large factor of addictions recovery includes the disassociation with friends that engage in the addictions behaviours. This study found that spending time with other recovering addicts at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre made addictions recovery more likely and sustainable. The wide range of social, physical, emotional and spiritual activities contribute to an individual's health and make it more likely to succeed in sobriety.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research study followed with recommendations that aims to improve response and prevention in when addressing addictions to the urban Aboriginal population:

Increased support for local, regional, and national governments urban services utilized by the Aboriginal community. More specifically, Friendship Centres require access to resources to increase their ability to provide these essential services, like cultural and traditional programming.

This study recommends establishing an addictions counsellor devoted to urban Aboriginal health issues; the community would benefit from addictions counsellors at Friendship Centres. Without these supports from government, Friendship Centres are not able to assist the community in healing and recovery.

This study recommends that national and provincial governments revise the funding process for addictions interventions in consultation with Aboriginal communities and increase core-funding measures to programs that are proven successful.

**For more information on this project visit:**

<http://uakn.org/research-project/an-exploration-of-addictions-recovery-among-aboriginal-peoples-who-utilize-the-friendship-centre-in-saskatoon-a-holistic-approach-to-healing/>

### **About Us**

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## 2014 UAKN RESEARCH BRIEF



The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: [www.uakn.org](http://www.uakn.org)



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