

INDIGENOUS PEER MENTORSHIP MODEL OF CARE

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Background:

Past and current social inequalities contribute to the over representation of HIV/ HCV among Indigenous people. Despite being only 12.9% of the population in Saskatchewan (SK), Indigenous people represent 79% of HIV diagnoses, and three times higher HCV infection rates than non-Indigenous population. The HIV and HCV epidemic is further fuelled by a co-epidemic of drug toxicity events. The trends of intravenous drug use (IVDU), infections and fatal drug overdose are indicative of the limited access to services such as harm reduction supplies, reliable health care and community supported, culturally responsive care in SK.

Description of model of care/ intervention:

Peer mentorship is widely regarded as a critical strength-based support service and harm reduction strategy. The Wellness Warriors is an Indigenous-led peer mentorship group that hosts regular Sharing Circles, with an Elder present, to share food, stories and smudge together. As an interventional approach, Sharing Circles are held weekly, and are well attended - often beyond capacity. Reducing the rates of new infections and treating HIV/ HCV requires a continuum of care with coordinate services and strength based supports.

Effectiveness

This work directly responds to the Canadian Commission on the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Call's to Action by promoting culturally responsive and trauma informed care. The Sharing Circles serve an important connection between those in need of supportive care for IVDU, HIV /HCV and Peer Mentors, who provide culturally responsive care and link to the health system.

"Coming together like this is ceremony, listening to each other, being our supports. Think back to our traditional ways, our communal living. That's the way I follow."

"Don't be shy to ask for help... we understand a lot of the issues.. We are not judgmental. A lot of us have been on the same path."

"I used to think that I could handle everything myself. But now - you can't. You need to open up. You need to start sharing with each other."

Chart 1: Quotes Sharing Circle Participants

Conclusions and Next Steps:

Sharing Circles held by the Wellness Warriors Peer Mentors is demonstrated as a supportive intervention and critical approach to interceding the epidemic of IVDU and HIV/HCV in SK. Recognizing the pivotal role of the Wellness Warriors will require the certification and full integration of peer mentorship into clinical care teams.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None