



Recovery Month

Be Courageous and Heal

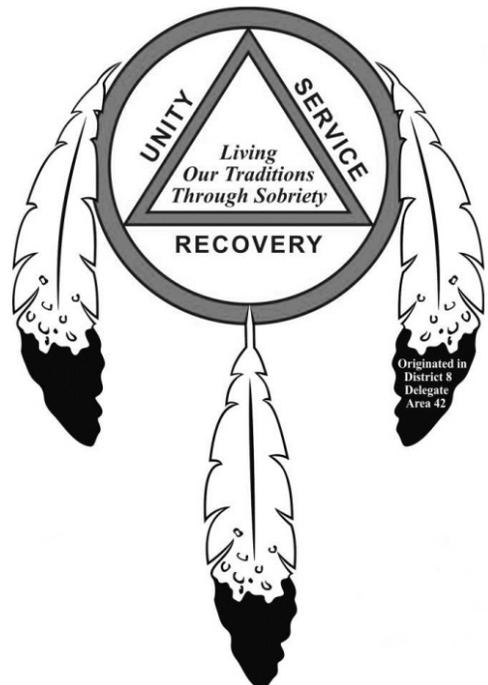
**“He who would do great things should not attempt them all alone.”
-Seneca Proverb**

While there is no single path to recovery, this document offers an overview of some culturally informed approaches to beginning and maintaining recovery, along with resources and links to more information. It is our hope these resources will be useful for providers seeking to help their Indigenous clients embark or continue their journey of recovery.

Recovery Month, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), is observed every September to promote and support new evidence-based treatment and recovery practices.

For Native communities, practice and knowledge-based evidence also is critical to recovery. Agencies like SAMHSA increasingly recognize the importance of culturally appropriate methods to support and strengthen recovery:

“Cultural values are the threads that tie one tribe’s or village’s practices to other Indigenous practices; they are also the links between the past and the present. They align with what the research tells us works in prevention.” (Culture is Prevention, SAMHSA Native Connections, <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-oy1-task-3-culture-is-prevention-final-2018-05-31.pdf>)



Culture in Recovery

Recovery takes many forms and culture acts as a protective factor, strengthening one's sense of identity and belonging and reducing the risk of substance misuse. Here are some common (though not necessarily universal) Native cultural practices that can help with a recovery journey:

Participating in cultural social activities

Community gatherings emphasize generosity and feelings of belonging. Through storytelling, for example, participants pass traditional wisdom and give other participants the chance to honor their identity, speak their own truth and learn values that give rise to self-efficacy.



Engaging with traditional medicines and ceremonies

Traditional medicines may include everything from herbs like sage and cedar to activities like talking circles or the canoe journeys of the Pacific Northwest. Some Native communities use sweat ceremonies; some use smudging ceremonies; some use drumming or singing, or body painting, or crafts like sand painting and weaving as part of their healing rituals.

Culturally specific activities help heal both the individual and the community by strengthening the connections between community members and their common heritage. For example, a small study involving Native men utilizing drumming circles as part of their recovery journey showed that participants had better overall physical health, fewer alcoholic drinks per day, and lower marijuana consumption compared with a control group. (Drum-Assisted Recovery Therapy for Native Americans (DARTNA): Results from a feasibility randomized controlled trial, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33966952/>).

Reconnecting to Culture

Cultural connectedness is a protective factor that has positive outcomes in recovery and reducing substance misuse. During recovery, reconnecting to culture is a journey for some Native people.

Powwows are universally a good way to connect to culture for the first time. Recovery powwows will not always be affiliated with your specific tribe but are a good introduction.

Talking to an Elder in the community or a spiritual person in the culture is a good way to reconnect with culture. For those who still have family on the reservation, getting in contact with them is a good practice. Contacting the tribal office also is a good starting point.

A good practice is talking with Elders and those in the community who are already involved in recovery. Get involved with seasonal and traditional activities in the community. Learning the language is a great way to get connected; many tribes offer language classes, and enrolling in them fosters community.

Get connected environmentally and be out in nature. If your culture uses cedar, sage, or sweetgrass, for example, getting out in nature and collecting the natural gifts from Earth are healthy activities that foster connection to culture.

Spirituality is the first step of 12-step programs like the Red Road to Recovery. In the Native world, it's about seeing yourself as part of a bigger picture. Spirituality is found where you live and within your community, getting out into nature and connecting with the gifts from Earth.

Remember: Recovery – and finding yourself in recovery – is a journey, not a single event.

See an example of a traditional smudging ceremony and what it means here:

<https://trauma-informed.ca/recovery/phases-of-trauma-recovery/culture-and-healing-videos/>



Native-Centric Programs

These programs focus on Indigenous ways of knowing to promote prevention and recovery efforts and to strengthen Indigenous communities and cultures.

White Bison

White Bison is a culturally based organization that promotes Wellbriety and emphasizes culturally based healing practices. Its philosophy is Native-centered and includes these points:

- Leadership exists to serve the people first.
- Elders and teachings are a guiding force to direct ourselves, families and communities.
- Interconnectedness – it takes everyone to heal a community
- Healing will take place through the application of cultural and spiritual knowledge
- OUR CULTURE IS PREVENTION

See White Bison's full philosophy and learn more about its programs here: <https://whitebison.org/>.

Equine Therapy

Equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) has become common in recent years and several programs focus specifically on Native relationships with horses. For example, Lakota tradition views the horse as a special relative that can provide healing from stress, anxiety, and trauma. Other programs, such as those at the Gila River Indian Community, focus on youth and families, using the horse's tendency

References

SAMHSA. *Native Connections: Culture is Prevention*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-oy1-task-3-culture-is-prevention-final-2018-05-31.pdf>

White Bison. *Medicine Wheel and 12 Steps: A Cultural Approach to Personal Recovery*. https://www.whitebison.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/MW12_MenBrochure_fultxt.pdf

Native American Fatherhood & Families Association. *Fatherhood is Sacred, Motherhood is Sacred*. <https://www.nativeamericanfathers.org/fatherhood-and-motherhood-is-sacred>

Wellbriety Movement. <https://wellbrietymovement.com/>

Dickerson, D. L., D'Amico, E. J., Klein, D. J., Johnson, C. L., Hale, B., Ye, F., & Dominguez, B. X. (2021). Drum-Assisted Recovery Therapy for Native Americans (DARTNA): Results from a feasibility randomized controlled trial. *Journal of substance abuse treatment*, 126, 108439. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2021.108439>

E. Korn, Leslie. *Rhythms of Recovery: Integrative Medicine for PTSD and Complex Trauma*. (2013). New York: Routledge, 2023. <https://books.google.com/books?id=q5a-EAAAQBAJ&pg=PT176&pg=PT176&dq=culture+is+recovery&source=bl&ots=LpdvCiGjIP&sig=ACfU3U0SIjPrUllh051-Wif5T0s2TpMxw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjG6ZGj8NyAAxWRAjQIHdBDP2M4HhDoAXoECAoQA-w#v=onepage&q=culture%20is%20recovery&f=false>

W. Plume, Jessica. *Four Legged Healers: Horse Culture as Medicine*. (Summer 2016). *Good Medicine*, Volume 27, No. 4. <https://tribalcollegejournal.org/four-legged-healers-horse-culture-as-medicine/>

to mirror the emotional state of its handler to help participants process emotions and reflect on what's happening in their own lives.

Learn more about equine therapy in Native communities here: *Four Legged Healers: Horse Culture as Medicine*: <https://tribalcollegejournal.org/four-legged-healers-horse-culture-as-medicine/>

Fatherhood is Sacred, Motherhood is Sacred

Created by the Native American Fatherhood & Families Association (NAFFA), the 12-week program for parents helps fathers, mothers, and families realize their full potential. A 3-day training course for facilitators offers participants the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of responsible parenting and specific techniques to help facilitators work with a wide variety of families.

Learn more at https://www.nativeamericanfathers.org/files/ugd/88c8ff_64075d77b75e46ee-a1434b48956f3487.pdf

Additional Resources

<https://wellbrietymovement.com/>

https://www.samhsa.gov/recovery-month/toolkit?utm_source=SAMHSA&utm_campaign=70f4a9227b-EMAIL_CAM-PAIGN_2023_08_18_06_14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_70f4a9227b-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D

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