

Culture as Necessity

Culture as Treatment has been shown to have benefits in all areas of wellness and reduce substance use problems. This is defined as the process of restoring Indigenous cultures, identities, and practices that were systematically outlawed by the Indian Act and enforced by the Potlatch Law and Residential Schools for over 70 years in Canada. *Culturally-focussed treatment* addresses wellness in a holistic sense that emphasized balance among one's tradition, culture, language, & community.

Indigenous people in BC are impacted by the opioid crisis and are over five times more likely to experience an overdose compared to non-Indigenous people. This overrepresentation in overdose rates is the result of intergenerational trauma and post-traumatic stress caused by the ongoing effects of cultural genocide. Members of the **Urban Indigenous Opioid Task Force (UIOTF)** unanimously agree that *Culture as Treatment* is necessary for reducing overdose deaths among Indigenous people and that these interventions are to be more appropriately termed as **Culture as Necessity**.

The opioid crisis has been called a crisis of social disconnection. In urban settings, access to Indigenous communities and culture can bring a sense of belonging and remedy feelings of isolation – even if only temporarily. Some Indigenous ceremonies and practices require sobriety or have a zero tolerance policy that excludes anyone under the influence of substances to participate. Communities can reduce the harm associated with drug use by connecting people with culture along any point of their healing journey. Those struggling with substance use issues may feel their spirit awakened when they hear drumming, smell medicines like cedar, or speak ancestral words. Culture embraces the individual as a spiritual being who holds a valuable purpose within the community.



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