

Experiences at Men's CSC-Operated Healing Lodges: A Qualitative Examination

Men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges offer an environment that help guide residents through their healing journeys.

Why we did this study

Healing Lodges are environments that use Indigenous values, traditions, and beliefs to offer culturally-relevant services and programs for Indigenous offenders. The goal of the current study was to qualitatively examine the experiences at the men's Correctional Service of Canada (CSC)-operated Healing Lodges, in order to gain understanding of the impacts, interventions, and overall operation of these sites.

What we did

To capture a holistic and comprehensive understanding, this study entailed semi-structured individual interviews with residents, Elders, and staff members from across the three CSC-operated Healing Lodges for men; Pê Sâkâstêw Centre, Kwikwêxwelhp Healing Village, and Willow Cree Healing Lodge. In total, interview data was collected and thematically analyzed for 36 residents, 7 Elders, as well as 22 staff members.

What we found

The narratives revealed various opportunities offered within the Healing Lodges for residents, many of which are cultural-specific or weave Indigenous perspectives and approaches. The opportunities include a range of ceremonies and activities, programs, education/vocational and employment opportunities, as well as different temporary absences. While the amount and breadth of these opportunities varies by Healing Lodge, the cultural ceremonies and activities, such as hobby crafts, as well as the in-house programs, appear to be crucial for keeping residents engaged in both their culture and healing journeys. Additionally, occasions to take part in cultural temporary absences and community service work arise as meaningful efforts towards gradual reintegration.

The experiences shared through the interviews further revealed that the environment within the Healing Lodges, which emphasizes Indigenous culture, offers a space that is seen as unique from mainstream institutional settings. The Healing Lodges allow residents to focus on their path towards healing by fostering a space for engaging in introspection, finding balance within themselves, and enabling a sense of commitment and accountability.

The relationships present within the Healing Lodges demonstrate a unique sense of community. For the most part, Healing Lodges are marked by strong connections and collaborations between residents, open and dynamic relationships with staff, and strong bonds with Elders built on support and guidance.

Finally, the research findings shed light on some of operational challenges and best practices present across these Healing Lodges, including those related to community engagement, the resident population, and staffing. In particular, maintaining an inclusive partnership with the local Indigenous communities, establishing a rigorous transfer process for residents, as well as hiring and retaining Indigenous and culturally competent staff appear to be essential for the overall successful operation of these sites. Despite the prominent benefits of Healing Lodges, arising as a common challenge across the sites is the merging of CSC policies or practices with the unique operational needs of Healing Lodges as being environments guided by Indigenous culture and traditions.

What it means

Taken together, the emerging themes and findings highlight the various unique opportunities, cultural environment, supportive relationships, and operational aspects of the Healing Lodges that collectively help guide residents through their healing journeys and support reintegration. While previous quantitative research has demonstrated that Healing Lodges promote safe reintegration (Hanby et al., 2020), this study supports the significance of men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges in offering culturally appropriate approaches that are responsive to the needs of Indigenous offenders.

For more information

Ridha, T., Hanby, L., & Sullivan, R. (2023). *Experiences at Men's CSC-Operated Healing Lodges: A Qualitative Examination* (Research Report R-444). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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