

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

## Experiences at O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi Healing Lodge

*With a strong cultural emphasis, O-Chi-Chak-Ko Sipi Healing Lodge helps residents heal and gradually reintegrate into the community.*

**Why we are doing this study**

O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi Healing Lodge (OHL) is a men's Section 81 facility<sup>1</sup> located in Crane River, Manitoba. The goal of the current study is to examine the experiences and perspectives of residents, Elders, and staff to provide a holistic understanding of the Healing Lodge. In collaboration with the Indigenous Initiatives Sector of Correctional Service Canada (CSC), this research also aims to explore the opportunities offered to residents and the operational challenges that are currently facing the Healing Lodge.

**What we are doing**

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with six residents and nine Elders and staff at OHL in October 2023. Two members of the research team conducted interviews (approximately one hour in length) exploring the participants' experiences and observations at the Healing Lodge. Key principles in the research centered on relationship building, reciprocity, and cultural sensitivity. Data from the current study will be included in a broader examination of all men's Section 81 facilities.

**What we have found so far**

As a Section 81 facility in a rural area, the location of OHL and its connection to nature contributes to cultural engagement and healing. Most residents indicated that the setting of OHL also brought a sense of comfort and familiarity as it reminded them of home (e.g., on reserve, by the water). The remote location was seen to pose some challenges for residents, in terms of distance to services/medical care and difficulty in arranging family visits. Staff also reported some challenges due to the length of commute and winter driving/roads. Residents indicated that additional electronic communication with family would be valuable to maintain relationships and help combat loneliness. Participants highlighted that living at OHL gave the residents the opportunity to build solid community connections (e.g., through volunteering/working) to prepare them for release.

Residents reported that there are plenty of ceremonies and cultural opportunities available both in-house and in the local community. While most of the participants considered the cultural program as the most helpful part of the Healing

Lodge, a holistic approach is taken at OHL in that there are additional offerings such as addictions treatment, mental health support, education, and employment opportunities. Residents indicated that more opportunities of this nature would be beneficial and help with their reintegration. The Healing Lodge also offers CSC correctional programs, which allows for penitentiary placements to OHL rather than requiring that residents complete programs prior to a transfer. While this widens the pool of potential residents, OHL still experiences challenges similar to other Section 81 facilities in fully utilizing the available capacity.

Overall, the positive, supportive relationships between residents, staff, and Elders promotes a sense of community within OHL. Staff and Elders were highly regarded by residents as putting a lot of effort into being available to support them both emotionally and culturally. OHL benefits from having long-term staff invested in the success of the Healing Lodge and its residents, although there have been challenges in the past in hiring and retaining staff (e.g., due to its remote location and lower wages in comparison to equivalent positions in CSC). Staff training was identified as an area of improvement, with suggested areas including security-related/self-defence, report writing, and updated CSC program training.

**What it means**

OHL's success in developing positive relationships was evident in the sense of community present within the Healing Lodge, with the local community, and with CSC. The therapeutic environment and opportunities available at OHL allow the residents to become immersed in culture and spirituality, heal, and live an Indigenous way of life. Strengthening existing programs, interventions, and employment/education on site would further enhance the holistic approach present at OHL.

**For more information**

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#). You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

**Prepared by:** Laura Hanby & Angela Smeth

<sup>1</sup> Through an agreement with CSC under Section 81 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.

