



Tackling First Nations addictions through culture

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SASKATOON, SK (June 25, 2015) – The leading authority on Indigenous addictions research in Canada is changing its name, forming a new partnership and launching a new way to measure wellness and the impact of culture in addressing substance abuse issues for First Nations. The Thunderbird Partnership Foundation is the result of a merger between the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (NNAPF) and the Native Mental Health Association of Canada.

“Drug and alcohol addictions among Indigenous people is a serious health concern in Canada,” says Board President, Chief Austin Bear of the Muskoday First Nation. He says a recent federal study found that a third of First Nations clients who entered treatment were diagnosed or suspected of having a mental health disorder.

“The new Thunderbird Partnership Foundation reflects the coming together of substance use and wellness issues in a vision for a continuum of care that is grounded in First Nations culture,” says Dr. Brenda Restoule of the Native Mental Health Association of Canada (NMHAC). Restoule also says the new partnership is an expression of the strengths of First Nations people who are working towards wellness with great courage.

Today’s announcement includes the launch of the highly-anticipated Native Wellness Assessment, which is a first for Canada. “Much of what we do in health research focuses on examining deficits and weaknesses. But now, for the first time, Indigenous treatment programs and centres across Canada will be able to measure wellness of the whole person based on their strengths,” says Carol Hopkins, Executive Director of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation.

Western treatment practices generally take a narrow view of the addiction, instead of the overall wellness from a holistic perspective. Health for First Nations is broadly envisioned as wellness and is understood to exist where there is physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual harmony.

It is recognized at accredited National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) and Youth Solvent Addiction Program (YSAP) treatment centres that Indigenous traditional culture is vital for client healing. Over time, the use of Native

Wellness Assessment will establish an evidence base for the important role of Indigenous culture in addressing substance use issues and in promoting wellness.

The Native Wellness Assessment will provide culturally-based information to guide treatment services, which can include spending time on the land, learning from traditional teachers and healers, as well as participating in storytelling, and dancing. A pilot test of the assessment tool reports positive outcomes, including the revelation that clients who knew their own language reported higher overall levels of wellness.

“We are happy to have a new national addiction information management system in place that will capture the evidence from the Native Wellness Assessment,” says Hopkins.

Together with its partners, the University of Saskatchewan, the Assembly of First Nations, and the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation will continue to advocate for and support the implementation of the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum and the Honouring our Strengths Renewal Framework.

Today’s media launch was held at at the Saskatoon Inn, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

To schedule an interview with the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, contact Sherry Huff, 519-401-5166, sherry@huffmedia.ca.

Visit our new website, thunderbirdpf.org, or join the conversation on Twitter, @ThunderbirdPF, #CultureIsStrength. Also look for us on Facebook and Pinterest.



Backgrounder

NNAPF/National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation

The National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation Inc. is committed to working with First Nations and Inuit to further the capacity of communities to address substance use and addiction. We promote a holistic approach to healing and wellness that values culture, respect, community, and compassion. Our top priority is developing a continuum of care that would be available to all Indigenous people in Canada.

NMHAC/Native Mental Health Association of Canada

The Native Mental Health Association of Canada (NMHS) is a national not-for-profit association that is governed and managed by Aboriginal leaders and exists to improve the lives of Canada's First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations by addressing healing, wellness, and other mental health challenges. NMHAC, established in 1975, grew out of the Canadian Psychiatric Association Section on Native Mental Health under the leadership of the late Dr. Clare Brant, Canada's first Indigenous psychiatrist.

HOS/Honouring Our Strengths

The Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations People in Canada (HOS) document is the framework for a continuum of care. It identifies First Nations culture as central to making a substantial difference in addressing substance use and mental health issues. Developed through national dialogue the HOS Renewal framework set the mandate for this very important research funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and NNAPF.

The Honouring our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment (CASI) research project is a collaboration between NNAPF, the University of Saskatchewan, the Assembly of First Nations and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. the aim of this community-based research team's work was to develop an Indigenous knowledge based wellness assessment instrument that can demonstrate the effectiveness of First Nations culture as a health intervention in addressing substance use and mental health issues.

FNMWC/First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum

The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum framework is built upon the Honour our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment (CASI) research project's vision for mental wellness. Mental wellness is a state of well-being and balance in which the individual can realize his or her own potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, and contribute to her or his own community. This balance is maintained when individuals have *purpose* in their daily lives, *hope* for the future, a sense of *belonging* and understand the *meaning* of creation.

The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework Team has been selected to receive the Deputy Minister's Award for Excellence 2015 in the Innovation and Creativity category for the impact they are having in the health field.

Chief Austin Bear, President, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation

Chief Austin Bear of the Muskoday First Nation has long demonstrated leadership in addictions; in the community, provincially, nationally and internationally. Chief Bear's involvement with NNADAP began when he held the position of Coordinator/Community Worker for the Muskoday First Nation. In the five years of service to NNADAP, he developed alcohol and substance abuse prevention programming for the community. Chief Bear has enjoyed more than 25 years of sobriety and is a Certified Addictions Counsellor. He has also served as the Chief of Muskoday First Nation for 25 years, and was elected in 1991.

Carol Hopkins, Executive Director, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation

Carol is a member of the Wolf Clan, and is from the Delaware First Nation of Moraviantown, Ontario. Carol came to this position from Nimkee NupiGawagan Healing Centre Inc., a youth solvent abuse treatment centre that is founded on Indigenous culture and life ways, where she was the founding Director for 13 years. She is the recipient of the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH)'s Champions of Mental Health 2015 Award for raising awareness of the role of Indigenous culture in addressing substance use and mental health issues among First Nations in Canada.

Dr. Brenda Restoule

Dr. Brenda Restoule, is a registered clinical psychologist who specializes in clinical and community development for Indigenous populations. Her area of expertise has led her to consult with government agencies, author teaching materials, participate in Indigenous research and speak to international audiences. She is an active board member of the Native Mental Health Association of Canada, where she currently acting as the co-chair and vice-president. Dr. Restoule is from Dokis First Nation, in Ontario, and graduated from the University of Western Ontario and Queen's University.

Dr. Colleen Dell

Colleen Anne Dell Ph.D. was appointed as the Research Chair in Substance Abuse at the University of Saskatchewan in 2007. Funded by the Government of Saskatchewan, her work concentrates on research, community outreach and training. Along with being the Research Chair in Substance Abuse, Dr. Dell is a Professor in the Department of Sociology and School of Public Health. She is also a Senior Research Associate with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Canada's national non-governmental addictions agency. Dr. Dell is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University and a Research Associate with the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre.

NNADAP/YSAP Treatment Centres

The National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) and Youth Solvent Addiction Program (YSAP) treatment centres participating in this national research project to produce the native wellness assessment are accredited with standards of excellence through various

nationally recognized accreditation organizations such as the Canadian Accreditation Council and Accreditation Canada. This speaks to the capacity and strength of the NNADAP and YSAP treatment centres. There are more NNADAP and YSAP treatment centres with this type of accreditation than mainstream treatment centres across Canada. 12 NNADAP/YSAP Treatment Centres were involved in piloting the new Native Wellness Assessment.

Indigenous Wellness Framework

The Indigenous Wellness Framework identifies hope, belonging, meaning and purpose as measurable indicators of wellness (NNAPF, 2015). Spiritual wellness is achieved through the presence of indigenous values, identity and belief and the result is **Hope**. Emotional wellness is achieved through relationships, a connection to family, community and having an attitude towards living; the result of which is **Belonging**. It should be noted that “family” is inclusive of extended family, culturally-defined relationships with those outside of one’s bloodline such as clan family, and most significantly family is inclusive of “other-than-human-beings’ such as land, and beings of creation. Mental wellness is not an all-encompassing concept and is used in this framework to describe one aspect of our being – our mind. Mental wellness is achieved through rational and intuitive thought and as these two aspects of thought are woven together to create understanding; the outcome of which is **Meaning** for and about life. Finally, physical wellness is achieved through an indigenous way of being and living life with wholeness; the outcome of which is **Purpose** (Dumont 2015).