

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Experiences at Prince Albert Grand Council Spiritual Healing Lodge

PAGC offers a culturally focused approach to healing and gradual reintegration for Indigenous residents.

Why we are doing this study

Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) Spiritual Healing Lodge is a men's Section 81 facility located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.¹ The goal of the current study is to better understand perceptions of PAGC Healing Lodge, as well as the challenges that are currently facing the operation of the site. This qualitative research represents a collaboration with the Indigenous Initiatives Directorate of Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and aims to provide a more holistic understanding of PAGC Spiritual Healing Lodge through the experiences and perspectives of residents, Elders/Spiritual Advisors, and staff.

What we are doing

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 residents and 8 Elders and staff at the Healing Lodge in May 2023. Interviews were conducted by two members of the research team, each taking approximately an hour to complete. The interviews focused on the participants' experiences, involvements, and observations at the Healing Lodge. Data will later be combined to examine all men's Section 81 facilities as part of a larger study.

What we have found so far

Overall, the cultural focus of PAGC Spiritual Healing Lodge was praised by the residents, particularly in comparison to their previous institutional experiences. The Lodge benefits from several Elders working on site, providing ample access for residents to engage in ceremonies and cultural activities. While there is a strong emphasis on culture and spirituality, this is supported by addictions treatment, Elder-led programs, and counselling, strengthened through community connections (e.g., volunteering with local First Nations). Through their work with Elders, residents highlighted the coping and life skills they were learning, along with the opportunity to address personal and intergenerational traumas. Additional educational and employment opportunities were identified as an area where improvements could be made.

The calm and peaceful setting of the Healing Lodge and its connection to nature is noteworthy in providing an atmosphere for healing and cultural engagement. The

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

proximity to Prince Albert also made it so residents could easily access services, resources, and support in the community, which they praised as an important "stepping stone" in their reintegration. Staff and residents identified a need for more opportunities for family/friends contact to further strengthen prosocial supports prior to release.

Interviews with residents and staff revealed a shared perspective that positive, supportive relationships between residents, staff, and Elders, promotes a sense of community within the Healing Lodge. In contrast to other institutions, there is no sense of a rigid divide between the staff and the residents, and staff were generally described as supportive. From the perspectives of staff, the pay is significantly lower than equivalent positions in the CSC, which limits the quality and experience of new staff.

PAGC Spiritual Healing Lodge has experienced challenges in reaching capacity, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to staff, the main barrier in reaching capacity is a lack of candidates meeting the criteria. Residents reported that the Lodge was not well advertised as they typically learned about it from other inmates, and they experienced long wait times prior to transfer once approved.

What it means

The experiences of the residents, Elders, and staff reveal a unique environment at PAGC Spiritual Healing Lodge that benefits the residents in terms of strengthening their cultural identity, their connection to people and place, and their prospects at successful reintegration.

Opportunities to expand outreach to potential residents and promote Healing Lodge options would be beneficial. Though this issue is larger in scope than PAGC, efforts to eliminate barriers to Healing Lodge placement are needed to increase capacity and speed up the transfer process for approved individuals.

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

