

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Experiences at Men's Section 81 Facilities: A Qualitative Examination

*Men's Section 81 facilities offer holistic, culturally focused environments that foster healing and community.***Why we did this study**

Healing Lodges are environments that are centered on Indigenous values, traditions, and beliefs. Within a correctional context, they offer interventions for Indigenous peoples to address the factors that led to their incarceration and prepare them for their release in the community. The current study focused on men's Healing Lodges operated by an Indigenous community or partner organization through an agreement under Section 81 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*. This study represents a collaboration with the Indigenous Initiatives Sector to collectively examine the benefits, experiences, and operational realities of men's Section 81 facilities.

What we did

To capture a holistic and comprehensive understanding, this study entailed site visits and semi-structured individual interviews between May and October 2023 at the four Section 81 facilities for men: Prince Albert Grand Council Spiritual Healing Lodge (Saskatchewan), Waseskun Healing Centre (Quebec), Stan Daniels Healing Centre (Alberta), and O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi Healing Lodge (Manitoba). In total, interview data were collected and thematically analyzed for 31 residents, 25 staff members, and seven Elders/Spiritual Advisors. Key principles in the research centered on relationship building, reciprocity, cultural sensitivity, and analysis from a strengths-based perspective.

What we found

The narratives revealed that residents are drawn to Healing Lodges for their cultural approach and to access traditional healing, learn more about their culture, and participate in ceremonies and cultural activities. While residents are seen to have a generally institutionalized mindset when first transferred to a Healing Lodge, residents were described as becoming more centered in themselves and gaining a better understanding of their personal and intergenerational traumas. The Healing Lodges provide a space for residents to strengthen and/or maintain their cultural identity, engage in introspection and self-reflection, and foster a sense of commitment and accountability toward themselves and their communities. Section 81 facilities place a strong emphasis on holistic and culturally focused approaches to help guide residents

through their healing journeys. Opportunities to engage spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally are available through ceremonies, cultural activities, programming, education, vocational training, and employment. The Healing Lodges provide a welcoming environment that encourages meaningful relationships between residents, Elders/Spiritual Advisors, and staff members. While there were some barriers identified in facilitating family visits, living at the Healing Lodge reinforces relationships with family and prosocial supports. Section 81 facilities further encourage gradual reintegration with an emphasis on building connections in the community to provide structure and support upon release.

From an operational standpoint, issues with reaching and maintaining capacity emerged at all four sites. Challenges in hiring and retaining qualified staff were also shared across Section 81 facilities. The challenges that emerged in the current study replicate those found in previous reviews, calling for broader solutions for Section 81 facilities to reach their full potential.

What it means

The emerging themes and findings highlight the meaningful impacts that Section 81 facilities can have on residents. Weaved throughout the narratives are examples of growth, resilience, and adaptation at both the individual and community levels. While the introduction and expansion of Healing Lodge agreements represent the Correctional Service of Canada's dedication to reconciliation, efforts to support Section 81 facilities in fully utilizing the available capacity are paramount to ensuring that incarcerated Indigenous individuals can access culturally appropriate supports.

For more information

Hanby, L., Hawthorn, D., Hildenbrand, A., Smeth, A., & Derksen, D. (2024). *Experiences at Men's Section 81 Facilities: A Qualitative Examination* (Research Report R-482). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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