Indigenous Cultural Safety: Trauma-Informed Care

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Introduction

Indigenous Cultural Safety (ICS) is about working to ensure people who identify as Indigenous feel respected and safe while accessing care and substance use (SU) treatment and recovery services. These services need to be provided in an environment that does not allow racism, discrimination, or stigma. Access to programming that includes cultural practices and connection, while building trusting relationships, is essential. It is also essential that service providers consider how a person's trauma has affected their well-being and recognize the need for psychological, physical, and emotional safety.

Trauma-informed care

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is an approach that focuses on giving support and treatment to help a person deal with the effects of trauma, such as anxiety and depression. It is about being able to recognize when a person's response to life situations is a result of trauma they may have experienced in their lives and understanding how service providers can work to keep the person safe when they feel the effects of trauma. Instead of asking "What is wrong with a person?", this approach encourages us to consider **"What has happened to a person?"** This will help you better understand and support a person's specific needs.

There is also a new approach to care — Healing Centred Engagement (HCE) — that you may start to hear of as you continue to provide person-centred care. HCE focuses on changing environments that can be harmful and creating healthy environments where residents and service providers are supported. Instead of only asking "What has happened to a person?", we also ask **"What is going well for a person?"** This will help you to build on a person's strengths to support them in their healing journey.

HCE also asks service providers to think about the systems and institutions they work in and how they might unintentionally cause harm. It encourages us to create new processes that make it easier for clients to get the support they need, reduce potential harm, and restore their well-being.

Key words and definitions

Trauma: Something difficult and overwhelming, such as adverse childhood experiences (ACE), intimate partner violence, or poverty, that disrupts a person's daily life and makes it hard to make decisions, feel safe, stay connected with others, and find meaning. Trauma takes many forms, including historical, intergenerational, developmental, repetitive, single-incident, and vicarious trauma.

It's important to consider how Indigenous communities might experience trauma differently, including historical, interpersonal, cultural, and systemic oppressions that have happened to a person and their community.

Indigenous Cultural Safety: Treating everyone respectfully. In the healthcare context, it's about making sure that nobody faces racism or discrimination when they are seeking care. This also means working to correct the unequal power relationships between patients and service providers in our healthcare system.

Most importantly, it is about recognizing and addressing unfair treatment that Indigenous people experience. By doing this, we can create safer services and more welcoming places for everyone. The ICS learning journey is never ending, just as learning throughout our lives and careers is ongoing.

Why is this important?

It is important to know about Canada's history of colonization and how this has resulted in strained relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. ICS helps people understand and recognize how colonization continues and affects all of us today.

When we understand this, the people who provide services can start looking at the systems we all work in, policies, how decisions are made, and what ICS looks like in practice. Also, we can consider how to all work together to make positive changes that support Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship building and establish trust and improve access to services.

Q&A

Question 1: People often ask, why does Cultural Safety mainly focus on Indigenous people?

It's because of policies and legislation in Canada that deliberately target Indigenous people (for example, the 1876 "Indian" Act) and institutions (for example, "Indian" Residential Schools and "Indian" Hospitals). These have had damaging impacts on the health and well-being of Indigenous people. They have and continue to separate families, stopping them from taking part

in their ceremonies and traditional ways, and speaking their traditional languages. This happened much more to Indigenous people than any other racialized group in Canada, which is why organizations focus on ICS training programs.

Question 2: Shouldn't we address all forms of racism?

ICS focuses on racism towards Indigenous people, but this doesn't mean ICS ignores other forms of racism. Racism in any form should never be tolerated. Understanding how racism affects Indigenous people can help us to respond to other forms of racism. However, due to historical laws and policies that have targeted Indigenous people, the inequalities they face are unique and require specific attention.

Question 3: What is colonization and how can we go about decolonizing?

Colonization is the action of settling on the lands and establishing control over Indigenous people and their land. It has resulted in the unfair, mistreatment of Indigenous people. Colonization has caused unequal access to basic rights and services, the separation of families, and has disconnected Indigenous people from their language, land, and traditional ways of being. To decolonize, it is important to understand and recognize how colonization continues, such as in policies and legislation, and what changes need to happen to begin the process of decolonizing.

Summary

ICS training is often referred to as a "learning journey." It includes learning about oneself, is ongoing, and never truly ends. As you continue learning, you will begin to see how harmful beliefs can surface and impact our lives and the lives of others, from decisions in our workplaces, program development and funding, to the creation of policies, practices and standards. This awareness is crucial in identifying what shifts and changes are necessary to support a movement toward equity for all. We encourage you to consider opportunities to embark upon this learning journey by:

- Connecting with your local Friendship Centre or health authority to inquire about accessing lCS training programs.
- Taking the Supportive Recovery Standards training on the Assisted Living Registry (ALR) website.
- Attending workshops and information sessions.
- Researching material online.
- Finding opportunities to attend local events hosted by Indigenous people in the area in which you work, live or play.

By expanding our knowledge and understanding of one another — who we are, where we come from, and what is important to us — we will be able to create safe positive environments where strong, trusting relationships can flourish. That in turn, will improve service provision and increase peoples' willingness to engage with and access SU treatment and recovery services.

Disclaimer: This factsheet is intended to provide helpful tips for supportive recovery operators. For information on registration and operational requirements, please visit **Assisted Living in BC**.

To learn more about Indigenous perspectives related to treatment and recovery, please see the **Land-Based Teachings & Indigenous Approaches to Healing Factsheet.**

Do you want to learn more? For more information about other topics, and to access training that can support you in your work, simply scan this QR code with your smartphone or tablet camera. A pop-up message with a link will appear - tap the link to access more content.