
**PRE-TREATMENT NEEDS AND BARRIERS OF NATIVE
AMERICANS SEEKING SUBSTANCE ABUSE RECOVERY
PROGRAMS**

by

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Masters Policy Report

**Prepared for
Mills College Public Policy Program**

and

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Francisco and the Family and Child Guidance Clinic of the Native
American Health Center**

May 2011

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Culturally competent substance abuse treatment programs for Native Americans typically experience high rates of success, however they are limited in number and often have multiple entry and funding requirements resulting in long waiting periods. Additional barriers such as unhealthy social and family environments, poverty, hopelessness, stigma, and shame further prevent Native people from utilizing substance abuse treatment programs. The purpose of this study is to identify the barriers and understand the needs of Native Americans who have made the decision to seek treatment for substance abuse, as well as to address found needs and barriers to provide better support to individuals during this time period. Friendship House Association of American Indians, Inc. of San Francisco (Friendship House) and the Family and Child Guidance Clinic (FCGC), the behavioral and mental health department of the Native American Health Center (NAHC), together identified the need to further explore the pre-treatment phase. This needs assessment is a direct result of that collaboration.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) recognizes the need for pre-treatment services as an important part of the continuum of care for any substance abuse treatment program. Initial research for this report, however, revealed SAMHSA has no working definition of pre-treatment. They use the term “Interim Services” when referring to services received before an individual has entered treatment. Further research revealed that interim services typically only comprise of a bare minimum of harm reduction provisions. These limited services do not sufficiently address the challenges Native people face in the pre-treatment time period. In order to guide the study and accurately assess needs and barriers, a definition of pre-treatment was required. With collaboration from research participants the following definition of the pre-treatment time period was developed:

The window of time that exists beginning when a person decides they need treatment for substance abuse and actively seeks treatment and ending when they are enrolled in a treatment program or for whatever reason stop seeking treatment (barriers become too much).

Background

To understand and address the specific needs of Native Americans seeking substance abuse treatment, the historical, social and political realities of Native people must be recognized. These realities account for a great deal of substance abuse in the Native community and put into context many of the barriers that Native people face in regard to treatment. Many Native organizations including Friendship House and FCGC have reclaimed traditions and cultural practices and are using them along with Native values to work towards wellness and healing of the Native community from the challenges of the past.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and was grounded in critical and indigenous research methodologies. Two focus groups and seven individual interviews were held. One focus group was comprised of six staff members of FCGC and the other of five Friendship House staff members. Five of the individual interviews were with staff members of Native community organizations and the other two interviews were with current clients of Friendship House.

Findings

The participant's responses were grouped into three categories: Barriers, Needs and Solutions. After a complex and iterative analysis process, the data revealed numerous barriers, which led to the emergence of the following **eight key needs** of Native people in the pre-treatment phase and the **five participant solutions** identified to meet these needs.

The eight key needs are:

1. Quick engagement while the window of motivation is still open
2. Building trust with service providers, in the Native and Non-Native communities
3. A variety of culturally competent treatment options that are sensitive to the specific needs of the individual
4. Help and guidance in identifying the best treatment options, overcoming obstacles to treatment, and accessing all available resources
5. Alternative activities and/or programs during the pre-treatment time period to "fill the void" when substances are not being used
6. Guidance to create a vision of wellness for the future to build self-esteem and regain hope
7. A transitional period to better facilitate entry into a structured treatment program
8. Streamlined systems and funding sources: from first point of contact, to entry into recovery programs

The participant solutions are the following:

- Institute culturally competent case management systems and create a position for “Wellness Advocates”
- Advance inter-agency collaboration and intra-agency/departmental streamlining
- Create a culturally appropriate comprehensive detox center
- Create a drop-in center with wrap-around services
- Develop a Native American mentorship program

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Friendship House and FCGC view the participant solutions as formal recommendations and initiate the process of seeking funds to see these visions realized.

It is also recommended that quantitative data collection be expanded to reveal more about the people who seek treatment each year at both Friendship House and FCGC. This data would help to better understand the scope of the challenges during the pre-treatment phase within the two agencies, and would allow the two organizations to design and implement programs that fit the scale of the need.

The addition of dedicated case managers, or “Wellness Advocates” on staff at both Friendship House and FCGC is recommended. These staff positions are imperative to the improvement of service delivery and quality of care as well as the expansion of quantitative data collection. They would work with clients on pre-treatment needs, and aftercare, following up with post-treatment clients to maintain relationships and track the recovery process. SAMSHA, Friendship House and FCGC are committed to a continuum of care, in which Wellness Advocates play a crucial role.