



ABORIGINAL HEALTH NETWORK

Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant
Local Health Integration Network

HNHB LHIN

Traditional Medicine in Today's Health System

December 5, 2014

Report to the Community

On December 5th, 2014 the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant (HNHB) Aboriginal Health Network (AHN) hosted a community engagement session on the topic of *Traditional Medicine in Today's Health System*. The primary purpose of this session was to create a forum for open dialogue about key issues facing Aboriginal community members when accessing Traditional Medicine. Through storytelling and group discussion, participants were encouraged to share their experiences and recommend ways to improve upon future programs and services. This session also presented an opportunity to spread awareness of key initiatives supported by the AHN. The AHN remains committed to understanding the community perspective and leveraging this knowledge when setting strategic priorities.

A total of 146 community members were in attendance at this session. Each participant joined one of five facilitated discussion groups and 93 individuals also submitted a written evaluation form. For the purposes of this report, common themes and ideas were collated and summarized. Overall response and feedback was very positive. Participants used words such as engaging, eye opening, high energy and sense of belonging to describe the atmosphere of the day.



A view of community members participating in group discussion at the *Traditional Medicine in Today's Health System* session.



A view of participants listening to a speaker presentation at the *Traditional Medicine in Today's Health System* session.

The remainder of this report will answer the following questions based on the feedback provided.

- What are the current gaps and barriers to accessing Traditional Medicine?
- How can we improve the patient experience when accessing Traditional services?
- What health topics would be most valuable to discuss at future AHN events?



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What are the current gaps and barriers to accessing Traditional Medicine?

What is the *HNHB LHIN Aboriginal Health Network*?

The AHN provides Aboriginal health and social service providers and the HNHB LHIN the opportunity to work in collaboration to address the health needs and issues of the Aboriginal communities. The purpose of this network is to provide a forum that will harmonize the efforts of First Nations, Metis and urban Aboriginal health providers toward creating a health system that:

- Meets the holistic health needs of Aboriginal people across the region from an Aboriginal perspective
- Integrates Traditional Aboriginal knowledge and healing systems for healthy people and healthy communities.
- Commits to input from Aboriginal communities regarding present and future programs and services.
- Improves the capacity of a broad range of stakeholders to contribute to improved health outcomes of Aboriginal people.
- Through HNHB LHIN CEO, liaise with the HNHB LHIN Board to inform decisions to positively impact Aboriginal health status and access to services.

When discussing existing gaps and barriers, community members identified both a shortage of Traditional services available and a low awareness of existing programs and where to access them. Beyond these two common themes, discussion groups identified the following gaps and barriers when accessing Traditional services:

- There is no provincial legislation requiring that access to Traditional Healers be made available.
- Traditional Healers are unable to secure funding or reimbursement for their services.
- Traditional Healers have difficulty navigating and/or fitting within parameters outlined in existing government policies and procedures.
- There is a limited relationship between Traditional Healers & Elders and mainstream hospital programs and services.
- There is a general lack of integration, acceptance, trust and respect for Aboriginal culture among non-Aboriginal program and service providers.
- Social Determinants of Health continue to present barriers for Aboriginal people trying to access health services. Barriers such as transportation, language, community connection, and intergenerational trauma were most commonly identified.



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How can we improve the patient experience when accessing Traditional services?

From the discussion group conversations, four themes were identified as displayed below. Rooted in each of these themes is a need to build stronger relationships between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal health service providers. These relationships will allow for more effective collaboration and knowledge sharing about how providers can work together to offer the best possible care for Aboriginal people in the HNHB region.

Improve Awareness & Understanding of Aboriginal Culture

- **Engage Mainstream Providers:** Create a strategy for engaging, coordinating, and educating large mainstream providers in Traditional services available e.g. work with Human Rights & Diversity departments to develop policies, network Traditional Healers with mainstream organizations.
- **Ongoing Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Create more opportunities for ongoing cultural sensitivity training to improve cultural safety, trust and respect.
- **Hospital Environments:** With improved cultural awareness, hospital administrators will better understand the need to create culturally safe hospital environments that can accommodate Traditional practices (e.g. hospital visitor restrictions, space for ceremony, community herb gardens).

Improve Access to Traditional Services

- **Increase Access to Traditional Healing:** Create a referral list to identify current access points for Traditional healing services
- **Expand the Aboriginal Patient Navigator Program:** Continue to expand the Aboriginal Patient Navigator Program and develop referral guidelines to Aboriginal Patient Navigators and/or Aboriginal Health Access Centers.

Explore Funding Opportunities

- **Financial Support for Traditional Healers:** Explore opportunities for funding to compensate Traditional services.

Engage the Community

- **Regular Community Engagement and Education:** Continue to facilitate opportunities for community engagement as a forum for empowering people to share their stories, learn about their health system, and ask questions.



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What health topics would be most valuable to discuss at future AHN events?

Creating more education sessions for sharing personal stories and learning about existing programs and services was among the most common responses. This session has started the conversation about Traditional Medicine in mainstream healthcare and the community would like to see this discussion continued at future AHN events. A list of the key health topics were identified as follows:

Traditional Healing and Services

- Share innovative strategies for harmonizing Traditional with mainstream medicine
- Share best practice examples of how Traditional Medicine is being blended with mainstream services
- Learn more about how to access Traditional services and supports
- Organize practitioner mentoring on how to be more inclusive of Aboriginal culture and Traditional healing practices
- Engage with Non-Aboriginal providers to understand what supports they need to coordinate Traditional Healing in mainstream hospitals and at the primary care level
- Focus group discussions to explore practical ways to overcome mainstream barriers
- Provide education to Aboriginal people about cultural ceremonies, practices, and Traditional methods

Mental Health & Addictions

- Share information about the child, youth, and adult services that are available
- Learn about programs and services for concurrent disorders and what family supports are available

Holistic & Spiritual Medicine

- Education on approaches and methods to promoting life balance
- Create forums for sharing best practice for holistic wellness
- More information about the social determinants of health and how they are being addressed by health services and programs

Palliative/End-of-Life Care

- What programs and services are available to Aboriginal people in the HNHB region?

What are the next steps?

The experiences shared at this session provided valuable insight into the needs of our Aboriginal communities. The AHN continues to learn from these experiences to guide future planning and decision-making. Exploring and sharing innovative ways to improve patient experiences and outcomes will enable health service providers to offer culturally safe and inclusive care for all Aboriginal patients. Next steps will involve identifying future opportunities for Aboriginal community engagement based upon the recommendations provided at this session. In addition, there is a demonstrated need to engage with mainstream providers and identify opportunities to build relationships amongst Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal providers.

Contact Us:

If you have any questions pertaining to content of this report or the work of the AHN please contact Kate MacNeil at kate.macneil@lhins.on.ca or 1-866-363-5446 ext.4216.