

Culture, Love and Trust as Enablers of Treatment: Aboriginal-led Healing at The Glen Group

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Background: Aboriginal people experience disproportionately high rates of alcohol and other drug (AOD) harm, yet remain underrepresented in treatment completion rates within mainstream services. Aboriginal community-controlled organisations offer culturally grounded alternatives that prioritise connection, identity, and relational healing. This paper explores how culture, love and trust operate as core mechanisms of change within The Glen Group, an Aboriginal-led residential rehabilitation service.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention:

This practice-based presentation draws on service delivery experience, program data, and lived experience insights from clients and staff at The Glen. It explores how the ADARRN MoC and therapeutic community principles are adapted through culturally grounded approaches, including Community as Method, cultural programming, and relational accountability. ADARRN MoC www.adarrn.org.au

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:

Observations from practice demonstrate that engagement and retention are strengthened when clients experience genuine connection, cultural safety, and relational trust. The use of 'love'—expressed through care, consistency, and accountability—supports identity rebuilding, emotional regulation, and pro-social behaviour. Cultural connection enhances meaning, belonging, and motivation for change. Together, these elements create an environment where participants are more likely to remain in treatment and achieve positive outcomes.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

Culture, love and trust are not ancillary to treatment but central to effective AOD rehabilitation for Aboriginal people. This model challenges dominant clinical paradigms by demonstrating the value of relational and culturally grounded approaches. Findings highlight the need for policy and funding frameworks to better recognise and support Aboriginal-led models of care as a critical component of the treatment system.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities:

Better engagement, retention and quality outcomes for Aboriginal people in treatment.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: N/A