

Symposium Title: Strengths-based cultural approaches to support First Nation's people in prison and post release.

Chair: Michael Doyle

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Authors:

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Aim: This symposium of presentations will explore evidence from the literature and perspectives from First Nations people in Australia and Canada on how to better support First Nations' people while in prison and post-release.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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PRESENTATION 1: Scoping review of First Nations specific behavioural programs delivered in prison in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA.

Presenting Authors: *Alison Evans*

Background: Current mainstream behavioural change programs in prisons cover topics including substance use, however, these programs generally do not address underlying causes of these behaviours among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people. The aim of this scoping review was to learn from past and current behavioural programs to understand what cultural frameworks and curricula have been used in delivering programs for First Nations people in prisons operating in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA.

Method: A scoping review was conducted using a predefined search strategy across nine electronic databases to identify peer-reviewed literature published between 2000 and 2024. Government departments for corrective services were contacted across Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA to identify programs delivered in prison within the last two years.

Key Findings: Our review identified 75 prison-based programs with a specific focus on First Nations peoples. Most programs were based on traditional cultural education, combined with western therapeutic approaches. Programs focused primarily on behavioural change aspects related to physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing, and a high proportion of programs included cultural aspects such as yarning, ceremony, and other cultural activities. Most programs were for men, reflecting the prison population. Most programs were facilitated in a group setting, either led by or co-facilitated with First Nations people.

Next Steps: These findings have helped guide the development of a new social and emotional wellbeing program. The program is being refined with input from a range of professionals experienced with delivering prison-based programs. The program will be pilot tested to assess feasibility for future implementation with young people in prison.

Implications for Practice: Evidence from this literature review supports recommendations for the use of traditional cultural practices to ensure culturally safe rehabilitation for First Nations people.

PRESENTATION 2: Incorporating cultural knowledge from First Nations health workers in the development of a prison-based program for First Nations people. (5min)

Presenting Authors: *Anna Grager, Kai Clancy*

Background: Australia's First Nations people are imprisoned at 15 times the rate (per population) of other Australians, with many of these people having some form of substance use issue. First Nations health professionals understand and successfully apply culturally based healing to support the rehabilitation of First Nations people in recovery. This presentation will outline the results of qualitative, semi-structured yarning sessions with 27 First Nations health workers to learn about the use of culture in therapy to support healing for First Nations young people.

Method: Following an Aboriginal (Australian) yarning methodology, 27 First Nations health workers were interviewed in Sydney, the Central Coast (NSW), Perth and Broome (WA). Findings were discussed with project investigators, and a draft program was developed. The draft program was presented to previously interviewed participants in a series of four yarning sessions to gather feedback and input to the draft program. An Aboriginal lens was applied through data collection and data analysis. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach.

Key Findings: Key themes identified represented health professionals' cultural ways of working, such as adopting client-centred, strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches. Several core topics were identified for program inclusion, focusing on cultural, spiritual, physical, mental and emotional health. Health workers also reported a range of cultural practices or activities they regularly incorporate that are beneficial for their clients' healing journey.

Next Steps: These findings of cultural knowledge and ways of working have informed the development of a new social and emotional well-being (SEWB) program. A planned Delphi study will confirm the feasibility of delivering the program in prison. The program will also be pilot tested with young First Nations people to assess its acceptability. A future process evaluation is recommended to test program implementation with First Nations people in prison.

PRESENTATION 3: Post-prison support for First Nations men in Australia and Canada: A strengths-based approach.

Authors: Michael Doyle, Steve Teekens & Leeton McGuiness¹

¹*The Glen Group Residential Rehabilitation Centre, Central Coast, Australia*

Background: The First Nations people of Australia (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) comprise 3.8% of the overall population but constitute 35% of the Australian prison population. The First Nations people of Canada comprise 5% of the overall population but are 32% of the Canadian Federal prison population. Many of the First Nations people who go to prison in both countries have drug and alcohol use disorders which have likely developed to cope with the ongoing intergenerational trauma from colonisation.

Method: In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with First Nations men and post-prison support workers in residential support services in Canada (Toronto) and Australia (Central Coast/Sydney) between February and July 2024.

Results: In total, 12 residents and five staff at Na Me Res (Toronto) and 18 residents and three staff at the Glen (Central Coast/Sydney) were interviewed. The British colonial system impacted the First Nations participants and their families in Canada and Australia in similar ways. The majority of First Nations men in both countries had been affected directly or intergenerationally by policies aimed at assimilating First Nations people including the removal of children. Cultural connect made a profound difference for these men and supported them in their healing journey. The men were aware there were many challenges ahead, particularly when they leave the residential service. However, being in a safe place

with other First Nations men (including staff), a place to which they could return for support, gave the men confidence that they could overcome these challenges.

Conclusions and Next Steps: An expansion of strengths-based programs that are specifically developed for First Nations men could better assist men to address issues such as substance use and reduce the possibility of returning to prison.

DISCUSSION SECTION: (30min)

Discussants: Michael Doyle, Steve Teekens & Leeton McGuinness.

Discussant's email: *michael.doyle@sydney.edu.au*

Outline: There will be two personal experience speakers which will be followed by a discussion panel with the presenters. A cultural ceremony will be performed to round out the symposium.

Aim: 1) ask questions about any of the three presentations; 2) to give the audience an opportunity to discuss the experiences of their organisation using strengths-based cultural approaches to support First Nations people in prison and post release

Outcome: We would like organisations and researchers to have a better understanding of the benefits of using Strengths-based cultural approaches to support First Nations people in prison and post release.

Drumming ceremony: *Steve Teekens*

END OF SYMPOSIUM