

New Resource Helps Tribal Communities Leverage Cultural Practices to Develop Effective Peer Programming

Catching Up With COSSUP, December 2023

The National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC) of Fox Valley Technical College and Altarum are pleased to announce a new resource to support tribes in the development and implementation of peer recovery support services (PRSS): [*Culturally Responsive Pathways to Peer Programming in Tribal Communities*](#).

Peer support services are modeled after traditional indigenous practices. PRSS have been practiced for nearly 300 years within American Indian and Alaska Native communities and are consistent with indigenous traditions and values, such as the use of community supports to address community safety and wellness. Through PRSS, individuals who have gone through substance use recovery help guide others through the same process, which involves substance use disorder (SUD) treatment or the provision of more direct support services, or both.

Research has shown that leveraging tribal cultural practices in intervention programming leads to improved outcomes and also allows each tribe to individualize its program based on its unique culture, traditional values, and rituals. For example, tribes have incorporated many different cultural activities in intervention and peer programming. These include sweat lodges, talking circles, ceremonies, classes for beadwork, cooking, and moccasin making, as well as traditional ways of hunting and gathering food, building shelters, tanning hides, and traditional regalia.

Culturally Responsive Pathways to Peer Programming in Tribal Communities highlights research-supported PRSS models and SUD treatment best practices, including general indigenous intervention models, such as White Bison's Wellbriety Movement, Circle Peacemaking, and the Matrix Model. These intervention models have proved to be culturally appropriate and adaptable for layering intervention strategies, including peer mentorship.

In addition, this resource is intended to serve as a guide to support any tribe seeking to replicate and customize these models in its community. It describes strategies to seek buy-in from tribal leadership, elders, service providers, and



the community. It also explores funding available to support the development of PRSS programs and approaches to ensure program sustainability beyond the life of a grant.

Further, *Culturally Responsive Pathways to Peer Programming in Tribal Communities* presents an indigenized version of the Sequential Intercept Model as a tool to identify possible entry points for a person with SUD to be introduced into PRSS programming. In other words, prevention and intervention efforts can be methodically applied within the context of a tribal justice system setting, thus allowing for multiple pathways for treatment, support, and healing.

Finally, PRSS present a culturally appropriate model for tribal communities that often see problems manifested by a single tribal member as representative of a larger community problem and therefore seek community solutions to them. PRSS are an ideal intervention for tribes, as they take a community approach to utilize existing tribal resources of peers in recovery and meet tribal members where they are, rather than try to force them to change through externally motivated interventions.

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The Bureau of Justice Assistance's Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP) funding and Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS) Purpose Area 3 funding are two of many funding opportunities available to support tribal communities in developing new and innovative substance use programming, including PRSS. Follow the COSSUP Resource Center for funding opportunities as they become available: <https://www.cossup.org/Program/Funding>.

For tribes interested in developing a PRSS program, there are many additional training and technical assistance resources available through NCJTC and Altarum that can be requested via the COSSUP Resource Center, at www.cossup.org. For more information on Altarum, please visit www.altarum.org. For more information on NCJTC, please visit www.ncjtc.org.

Altarum and NCJTC thank the courageous tribal community programs and members who work tirelessly to address substance use in their communities, especially those whose programs are highlighted in this resource. The best solution to a community challenge is a community solution.

