NNAPF Discussion Paper: Integration of Literature Review and NNAPF Documents

Indigenous Governance in the Context of Canadian Healthcare

Prepared for Native Nations Addictions Prevention Foundation

By

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Abstract

This paper combines a literature review and a collection of documents utilized by the Native Nations Addictions Prevention Foundation (NNAPF) to formulate a discussion on how indigenous governance informs health governance in Canada's First Nation communities. The combined documents find enough evidence to support the argument that indigenizing health governance by incorporating indigenous traditional values and worldviews will lead to better outcomes for First Nations communities in the mental health and addictions field. These outcomes can be seen in strengthened relationships among all stakeholders, more culturally appropriate programs and services and accountability defined in indigenous terms. The result is more balanced relationships across multiple jurisdictions. The literature clearly reflects this balancing in the language of decolonization; i.e. indigenizing health governance is one avenue toward decolonizing the relationship between First Nations and the Canadian government. But decolonization means that health governance models must go beyond simply being made culturally relevant; they must be critically evaluated for the ways they potentially perpetuate and reinscribe colonial power structures by identifying the underlying value systems of their forms. At the same time, scholars argue that methods of governance that blend the best of indigenous systems with the best of western methods can also produce positive and effective results in the mental health and addictions field.

Introduction

This paper is the result of the integration of a literature review and a collection of documents supplied by NNAPF that examine various elements of indigenous culturally based governance and its applicability to mental health and addictions programs in Canada. The

literature review focused on indigenous governance in a broader sense in an effort to introduce

concepts gleaned from peer reviewed and grey literature that lend themselves to the discussion.

The integration of the documents are overlaid, informed and tied together by the mandate of the

document *Honoring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Abuse Issues*

Among First Nations People in Canada. Together the documents present a perspective from

which we can not only make certain assumptions, but advance new ideas that can then be applied

in the mental health and addiction fields in First Nations communities. These assumptions and

ideas circumscribe a new way of understanding and being able to talk about how the histories of

colonization and patriarchy have interfered with and disabled First Nations communities. The

literature demonstrates a direct connection between self-governance in a community and the

collective mental health of its members. The questions this paper addresses are: what is the scope

of culturally based indigenous governance as it relates to mental health and addictions programs

in Canada? What are the strengths and limitations that can be identified in the literature on

indigenous self-governance, and what does culturally based indigenous self-governance look like

when applied in this context? The conceptual image that emerges from the literature is a new

paradigm that incorporates the language of decolonization in the realm of indigenous addiction

and mental health as the guiding principle that facilitates movement toward Indigenous culturally

based governance models which result in improved client outcomes and strengthened

organizational processes.

Decolonization, Self-Governance and Self-Determination

"Decolonization" is a term that means different things to different people. Clearly, what

decolonization meant in colonial Africa, India and Asia is very different than what it means for

indigenous peoples in the Americas. Settler colonialism presents a different set of challenges than it did for societies whose indigenous populations remained in the majority. Rather, it refers to the ways indigenous peoples lives and lands have been co-opted by the state and how those processes can be undone to live in peaceful coexistence with settler societies. The definition we use is taken from Yellow Bird and Waziyatawin in *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook (2005):* "Decolonization is the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands, and is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation" (pg. 2). For the editors and authors of this book decolonization applies to all realms of indigenous life including the political, the cultural, and the personal. They stress that decolonization begins in the mind, an idea embellished upon by Alfred and Corntassel (2005). Because colonization targeted indigenous peoples personally and spiritually in addition to politically and socially, indigenous peoples must reclaim their indigeneity in ways that extend beyond colonial definitions and resists colonial structures. Reclaiming indigeneity must happen on all levels from the collective to the individual and is itself an act of decolonization. Indigenous identity is the reaffirming of an indigenous worldview and is constituted in history, ceremony, language and land and centralizes relationships (or kinship networks) with all living things as the core of authentic indigenous identity.

Alfred (2009) notes that colonization is the process of disconnecting indigenous peoples from their responsibilities to one another, to land and to culture (pg. 5) and is ultimately a process of disempowerment. It is an exercise of power over others without their consent and because it is a matter of power relationships, how we frame our concepts is important when it comes to self-governance and sovereignty. The terms do not mean the same thing, Alfred

cautions, and neither is synonymous with self-determination. Sovereignty is in fact an inappropriate concept for native peoples because it is a European concept that reinforces hierarchical relationships and is a model that the modern nation-state is built upon. It does not have any connection to indigenous values and is inconsistent with indigenous political goals. By the same token, self-governance is a process that emerges out of the ability to be self-governing, a "right" which the state "grants" native people within the scope of domestic law; it is a "state-delegated form of authority" in indigenous communities (pg. 78).

Here is the point: if we think of colonization as that which has stripped native people of their power and caused them to devalue their cultures and at times even discard their worldviews, then reinstituting indigenous self-governance in any realm of indigenous life is a step in the right direction on the path toward decolonization (which is also a process), but is not a model we can think of as fully-actualized "decolonization." In terms of how it relates to the addiction and mental health fields, instituting culturally based self-governance processes in the delivery of services and programs can be thought of as a peeling away of one layer of the colonized relationship between First Nations and the Canadian government, one with profound healing potential for indigenous communities.

The literature on indigenous governance reflects discussions of indigenous peoples' resistance to the colonial relationship that can be envisioned as a linear spectrum of ideological possibilities ranging from cultural relevance to self-determination. In other words, when scholars and activists talk about how the colonial relationship can or should be changed to improve conditions in indigenous communities, the solutions on the conservative end evokes the language of cultural relevance; i.e. programs, services and systems would be more effective if they were

more culturally relevant or sensitive. On the other end of the spectrum, scholars and activists frame solutions in terms that affirm self-determination, implying a restoral of indigenous ways of doing things. In between are solutions and ideas that propose varying levels of cultural relevance (or "cultural matching," to borrow the phrase from Graham and Levesque, 2010), sometimes conflating cultural relevancy (or matching) with "sovereignty" (as is the case with Graham and Levesque's model for First Nations' governance and economic development). However, cultural relevancy as the objective for solutions to deep, historically rooted problems (such as substance and alcohol abuse) does not go far enough in addressing the scope of problems facing indigenous communities. It may hold some inherent meaning for a community to adapt cultural frameworks to assist them in their goals, but simply making programs culturally relevant falls short of acknowledging the ways in which ongoing relationships of unequal power continue to hinder their ability to heal from the wounds perpetuated by that imbalance of power.

Applying the framework of self-determination to indigenous communities' programs, services and systems goes beyond making them culturally relevant because it historicizes the colonial reality of their relationship to Canada. It acknowledges that the problems First Nations peoples are working to overcome are innately political in nature, and inextricably bound up with historical realities such as the loss of land, broken treaties and forced assimilation. To talk about cultural relevance without acknowledging the history of indigenous subjugation is to ignore the very core of why and how the problems manifested to begin with. Self-determination naturally opens the door to talking about decolonization. Decolonization offers hope that there is a way out of the convoluted maze that the colonial relationship has created.

Abele and Prince (2006) have identified four models of indigenous governance in Canada. Since the establishment of the 1982 Canadian Constitution, these models represent concurrent powers and greater asymmetries in intergovernmental relations and Canadian federalism, and are based on contingent and differing histories of various Aboriginal groups, with no one model likely to emerge as dominant. Three of them appear as models that maintain varying measures of Canadian sovereign superiority, but the nation-to-nation model is defined in terms of dual federations in which Aboriginal authorities exist alongside and in relationship to the Canadian federation defined by treaty. The exercise of Aboriginal power is seen as outside and prior to the Canadian state, constituting two legitimate systems of power in Canada. This system of dual treaty confederations is embodied in historical documents such as the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Two Row Wampum (*Kaswentah*) of the Haudenosaunee as well as other federal documents. Affirming a framework of dual federations maintains the conceptual space of self-determination (and by extension decolonization), affirming these ideas as the foundation for the mental health and addictions field and recognizing it as one site where the political relationship between First Nations and Canada is enacted.

It is the responsibility of First Nations, then, to assert their self-determination in all realms of self-governance, not just in government as a structure but governance as a process enacted at all levels of a community. This means decolonizing the process of governance and restoring or instituting culturally based systems of governance. Robert Odawi Porter (2005) offers a nine-step guideline for how indigenous governments can decolonize their governance processes (the guidelines are applicable to governance systems in general).

1. A working group should be formed to study how a governance system can be reformed—it is a development forum. For a government the focus would be constitutional reform, but in the case of other kinds of organizations it would be how the governance process itself would be reformed.

2. The roles of the organization need to be redefined—the central purpose for its authority. It is idealistic as the working group should engage in a consensus-building process, and the outcome could result in a mission statement or preamble.

3. Research the historical political behavior and historic function of tribal government (or in this case the governance practices) paying attention to things like gender roles and the adherence to tribal traditions. Caution is advised against automatically following the example of the nation-state, which too easily reaffirms "colonial policies under the guise of actually trying to rid yourself of them" (pg. 103). Old texts about tribal life should be used.

4. Assess the degree to which historical notions of governance still apply and determine the governing traditions that continue to be relied upon, including the oral and the written. These will indicate the tribe's core political belief systems.

5. Evaluate historical norms for continued usefulness. The emphasis is on the values (rather than the rules) that underlie traditional systems.

6. Creativity needs to be employed when drafting a document on governing principles, to avoid the mindless reproduction of language from western-style governing constitutions.

If a constitution is to be written it should be in original prose and devoid of legalese. Some elements may not have to be written at all.

7. The working process should be done deliberately and openly to assure legitimacy.

8. Convince conservative opponents that good governance is in everybody's best interest in the event that there is resistance to governance reform.

9. Exercise patience and listen to the people who may not know what they want, but who usually know what they don't want.

The ideas on this list are evident in several of NNAPF's documents, particularly *Nation Building for Seven Generations Parts 1 & 2* (Meyers, Antone, Dumont, Powless & Reuben, 1997). In this model for restoring traditional governance in Native cultures we see a broad discussion of historical governance processes of the Annishinabe, Cree and Haudensaunee; it names the worldviews upon which they were based, the need to return to those roots, and then identifies and specifies how those systems can be put into place in Annishinabe culture. It is also consistent with the suggestions and guidelines in the *Health Governance Models Workbook* and dovetails well with the *Beyond Programs* (Anaquot, 2011) document. In the latter, the Ladder of Participation model is especially useful for helping to illustrate the culturally relevant vs. self-determination continuum. The IIMHL/NNAPF meeting minutes from September 13, 2011 also demonstrates Odawi Porter's ideas at work.

Worldview- Retrieving the Wisdom of the Past

The literature plainly demonstrates that the number one premise of a decolonized indigenous governance system is that it not only incorporates the worldview of a culture, but that

it be based on it. However, settler colonialism's mandate to eliminate the Native via assimilation and other technologies (Wolfe, 2006) meant that many elements of Native culture were subsumed by the dominant state, subsequently requiring their resurrection. Although the amount of cultural loss varies from tribe to tribe, as Porter (2005) argues a careful study of the tribe's historical norms and political belief systems can lay the foundation for renewed governance practices that are culturally appropriate. The imperative is that governance reflects the core values of a culture. And as Alfred (2009) notes, indigenous peoples *have* survived and "the frameworks of their value systems remains intact and vital. Indigenous governance systems embody distinctive political values, radically different from those of the mainstream. Western notions of dominion (human and natural) are noticeably absent; in their place we find harmony, autonomy, and respect" (pg. 29).

Grinde (1992) powerfully illustrates how an intrinsic indigenous worldview is embedded in the governance system of the Iroquois nations. Values rooted in gender balance, relationship, group dynamics, clan relationships and respect for individual autonomy were not mutually exclusive concepts but part of a highly functional whole. Likewise, these are the values articulated in the IIMHL/NNAPF meeting on what culturally based governance looks like (while it stresses the spiritually-based element of indigenous worldviews). The same is true of the *Nation Building for Seven Generations Parts 1 & 2* (Meyers, Antone, Dumont, Powless & Reuben, 1997) document. Additionally, Ladner (2006) argues that because Indian Act Band Councils are not true indigenous governments (they are a form of delegated power and authority referred to by Alfred [2009]), Native people must initiate a constitutional renewal process by "dusting off" and reinstituting traditional governance practices. The Nimkee Nupi Gawagan

Healing Centre can be cited as a highly successful example of a revived and reinstituted traditional governance practice.

Reinvigorating indigenous cultural worldviews in the context of decolonizing governance has implications beyond the political. Duran and Duran (1995) discuss the ways Native people have been psychologically traumatized by the process of colonization and what they unapologetically call a holocaust. Although their work was written in the context of Native Americans in the United States, the circumstances are parallel to First Nations in Canada. Intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder can be said to have several phases that roughly mirror the dynamics of the colonization process (i.e., first contact, economic competition, invasion/war, subjugation and establishment of reservations, boarding school era and forced relocation). The trauma associated with each phase has been "systematically interwoven into the fabric of the Native American family for generations" (pg. 30) and is generationally cumulative. But, unlike the Jewish Holocaust, the indigenous holocaust has largely gone unacknowledged by the world; this denial combined with unresolved grief (uncompleted mourning) is a stumbling block to indigenous peoples' healing. Intergenerational trauma directly corresponds to the disproportionately high levels of substance abuse, alcoholism and suicide rates among Native people. In assessing solutions, Duran and Duran's study advocates for community-based treatment models that incorporate indigenous worldviews implemented by indigenous peoples themselves, and a process of education of non-Native people who work in the realm of government, funding, and service related to indigenous health care. In the context of Canada, the *Renewed Framework to Address Substance Abuse Issues Among First Nations People* goes above and beyond these ideals.

As the literature on culturally based governance reveals, embedding indigenous worldviews in the governance process consistently evokes the notion of accountability and what it means to indigenous peoples. Because indigenous peoples' ideas of accountability vary so much from those of western culture, it is essential to this discussion. These ideas spring forth directly from their very different worldviews on where their responsibilities lie, thus to whom they are accountable. This is made obvious in the NNAPF documents as it is mentioned numerous times and is elaborated extensively on in Alfred (2009), Alfred and Corntassel (2005), Duran and Duran (1995), Grinde (1991), Porter (2005), Smith et al (2008) and Tait (2008). In western governance systems those to whom governing bodies are accountable are inevitably funders and other entities in hierarchical, power-based relationship systems. In indigenous cultures accountability is vested in a system of reciprocal relationships that extend beyond those of financial resources including future generations, clan, community, land, cultural tradition, and the spirit inherent in all aspects of life. It is a culture-centered concept of accountability as opposed to resource-centered (IIMLH/NNAPF Meeting Minutes, 2011). An example of indigenous accountability in the context of a governance system is manifest in the governance bundle. The bundle is the physical embodiment of indigenous values invested in the objective of balanced relationships in all realms of life (not just to funders) and its presence is a reminder to the people about where their responsibilities lie as human beings, not just receivers of money or services. In this way accountability is holistic and spiritually based.

Finally, clarity about indigenous worldviews in governance should be informed by a critical indigenous philosophy as framed by Turner (2006). Indigenous "word warriors" as Turner calls them, are necessary to articulate an indigenous philosophy that differentiates their philosophical frameworks from western philosophy in their decolonization projects. Simply

stated, indigenous philosophers embrace indigenous thinking, ideally grounded in Native

languages and are the keepers of these ways of knowing the world (pg. 9). Word warriors, on the

other hand, are indigenous scholars and intellectuals who are responsible for transmitting this

knowledge where appropriate and untangling colonized ways of thinking from those of their

uncolonized indigenous ancestors. This means they must be the listeners while the philosophers

are the teachers and guides (pg. 144). These are elements that forms the core of a critical

indigenous philosophy which can then be applied to the purpose of formulating a framework for

indigenous governance systems, and can also serve as a system of checks and balances to prevent

falling automatically back into mainstream governance processes.

Examples in the Literature

The literature review and NNAPF documents together uncover several notable examples

of ways the cultural relevance/self-determination continuum model is either evident or framed in

normative terms as part of a decolonizing discourse. Levesque and Graham's 2010 Institute on

Governance study has already been cited for the ways it under-determines the role of indigenous

culture in effective governance and dehistoricizes colonization as responsible for the social

pathologies in indigenous communities today. The study examines governance for the purposes

of economic development (framed in terms of nation-building); it emphasizes the need for

indigenous peoples to adapt to mainstream models of organization that favor successful business

practices and are a cultural match for the community. Somewhat disturbingly, they cite the need

"to increase the mobility of residents of Indigenous communities with a view to increasing their

exposure to living and working in mainstream society" (pg. 8). It is highly debatable that this

would be a beneficial approach to First Nation's peoples, especially if the goal is to reinvigorate

traditional cultural practices and renew the core values of the society. Additionally, there is no mention of the very different indigenous worldviews compared to mainstream western society relative to ideas about accountability. If a community decides that their first priority is to improved economic development, the model is perhaps useful (although it still raises questions about the role of values and worldviews in governance). However, applying these principles in the context of health governance is questionable at best; it runs the risk of re-inscribing the hierarchical power dynamics already at work and continues the colonial project of undermining indigenous cultures.

A second example of the cultural relevance/self-determination continuum idea at play in the literature is evident in Fondahl & Irlbacher-Fox's research on indigenous governance in the Arctic (2009). Pointing out that although indigenous peoples in the Arctic have been impacted by impositions by nation-states, indigenous governance has retained much of the character of indigenous culture, Arctic peoples have nonetheless merged elements of traditional governance with "modern" (or mainstream) governance practices. One of the primary reasons these "high-context" cultural approaches is possible is because their territories are peripheral to state interests and they have been less dramatically impacted by external pressures than other Native peoples. In a territory where approximately 85% of the population is Inuit, Nunavut is a prime example of how indigenous peoples have blended traditional with modern governance practices, incorporating the Inuit concept of *Inuit Qaujimanituqangit* (IQ) into their governance systems. IQ is roughly understood as a system of indigenous cultural knowledge that is a "result of their living in and practicing and basing their cultures in a certain geographic area since time immemorial" (pg. 14). It permeates all aspects of government programs and services. The

authors draw on Alfred (2009) to identify key elements of indigenous governance which they

found applicable to governance in Nunavut:

> Governance in an indigenist sense can be practiced only in a decentralized, small scale environment among people who share a culture. It centers on the achievement of consensus and the creation of collective power, bounded by six principles:
>
> • depends on the active participation of individuals
> • balances many layers of equal power
> • is dispersed
> • is situational
> • is non-coercive
> • respects diversity (Alfred, 2009: 50-51)

In Nunavut, these principles are distilled through and expressed in what the authors see as the

defining elements of Inuit governance:

- Knowing through experience

- Merit as a source of authority

- Decision-making by consensus

- Being part of the environment

- Using resources wisely for the common good

- Respecting diversity

Interestingly, among the authors' key findings is that indigenous governance and western

governance are not mutually exclusive and may be effectively influenced by each other (pg. 17).

This latter point is reinforced in the research by Smith, et al. (2008) on decolonizing

possibilities for governance in Aboriginal healthcare organizations. Reaching well beyond

making healthcare delivery simply culturally sensitive or relevant, the authors normalize

colonization as a key consideration in order to identify processes that can be more responsive to

First Nations' needs. The authors argue that governance in Aboriginal health care matters as a

mechanism that can advance the broader vision of self-determination (pg. 6), and recognize that

"the governance models that structure the roles and relationships of local organizations directly

influence their capacity to develop responsive programs and contribute to either perpetuating

colonial relations, or to decolonization of societal institutions and reduction of health disparities"

(pg. 20). Because healthcare in Canada occurs at an intersection of so many different

jurisdictions and levels of decision-making, it is imperative that all stakeholders (community and

individual clients, providers delivering care, organizations implementing care, the Tribal Council

or Regional Health Authority, and the provincial or federal government) share a vision for a

governance model that not only effectively mediates the multiple stakeholder views, but does not

undermine Aboriginal voice, "strategic or historically situated vision, [or] respect for autonomy

and self-determination" (pg. 20). A mixed-methods approach to governance that incorporates the

concept of cultural governance (how Aboriginal voice, autonomy, views of accountability and

strategic vision inform decision-making processes) can assure the development of relationships

beyond the colonizing relationships, values and institutions that fail Aboriginal people.

This study is yet another source that substantiates the findings articulated in the

IIMHL/NNAPF September 2011 meeting. The notion of a mixed-methods approach to

governance is somewhat analogous to Howard Elijah's discussion of how the different modes of

governance were acknowledged between the original European colonial governments and the

Oneida in the Two Row Wampum Belt, and in a sense represents a revisiting of that original

relationship. But more to the point is the myriad ways the discussion and the study mirror each

other about what the elements of culturally-based governance consists of and the need for it in

healthcare delivery. The most salient of these is accountability, voice, autonomy and self-

determination.

Finally, a decolonizing discourse directly applicable to the addiction and mental health fields in the research by Tait (2008). In arguing for a moralizing strategy that decentralizes the treatment of mental distress and addictions away from political and economically based models to one that is primarily informed by moral governance, Tait addresses the structural violence inherent in the healthcare system (pg. 33). The strategy invokes the concepts of ethical space and cultural safety which necessitates a reconciling of western science-based knowledge systems with the spiritually based learning systems of Aboriginal peoples (pg. 34). In so doing Tait, like Smith et al. (2008), also makes the case that ethically based guidelines can be forged out of a blending of the best of western and Aboriginal understandings of morally-based governance, while grounded in Aboriginal epistemologies and worldviews on what is moral and ethical (pg. 56).

Raising the issue of culturally-based morals and ethics in the delivery of mental health and addictions healthcare delivery is necessary to the discussion of culturally-based governance because it recognizes that there is not one universally accepted idea about what constitutes "ethical" or "moral," especially in relation to Aboriginal communities. But more importantly, good governance must be based on what is ethically and morally correct or appropriate within the context of a community. It is a precursor to describing what an indigenous governance system will look like. Tait's research has the potential to connect to virtually all of the NNAPF documents through its ability to deconstruct and question any preconceived ideas and assumptions about what the un-decolonized healthcare system is based on. That is, the authors of virtually all the NNAPF documents by and large articulate the same idea: in order to formulate a framework for culturally based governance systems the beginning place is what is considered

moral and ethical. That is a matter of worldviews and values; decolonizing governance is thus a shifting of those worldviews and values.

Conclusion

Between the literature review and the NNAFP documents, it is clear that approaching indigenous culturally based governance from a decolonization framework within the mental health and addictions fields is a milestone that can contribute to decolonizing discourses in other realms of indigenous health and wellness in Canada. Additionally, there is enough evidence in the NNAPF documents that links enhanced levels of self-determination with enhanced well-being in indigenous communities, providing hope for a better future for Aboriginal communities, in keeping with the vision and spiritual mandate to act on behalf of the seven generations to come. Some concerns remain, however. First Nations communities run the risk of not going far enough to decolonize their mental health and addictions programs and services if all they are doing is "indigenizing" the Carver model (merely making it culturally relevant) which embeds hierarchical power structures within it, counter to Aboriginal values of power equity and sharing of responsibility. As Porter (2005) reminds us, indigenous peoples must be creative in reimagining new (or revived) governance systems. It is reasonable to expect that as communities undertake the rebuilding of their governance systems they will be works in progress for years to come.

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