

Land-Based Healing

Culturally-based care for youth addiction



Land-based healing for Indigenous people and communities can improve wellness by strengthening cultural identity, mental health, and resilience. Studies show that in Indigenous cultures, Land and Water are understood as sacred relatives with spirit, carrying responsibilities for care and reciprocity.¹ Land-based healing programs are predominantly community-designed: Price et al.² found that 77% of 153 programs in Canada and the U.S. were developed at the grassroots level by Indigenous communities, most with a mental wellness focus and involving recreation, subsistence skills, Elder knowledge sharing, and cultural activities involving ancestral Indigenous land.

Research indicates that land-based activities contribute to improvements in mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, while promoting cultural continuity and learning.^{3,4} However, access to these programs is limited, even where

Traditional Healing Spaces have been created.⁵ Despite these barriers, examples of successful models, such as oral health initiatives rooted in cultural land practices and youth mental wellness camps, highlight the importance of land-based work to Indigenous self-determination and health equity.

For Indigenous youth facing addiction, land-based healing programs can provide culturally grounded support alongside conventional approaches, emphasizing identity restoration and community support. These initiatives often integrate ceremony, storytelling, and time on the land to rebuild relationships, creating safe spaces for youth to reconnect with their heritage while addressing mental health and substance use challenges. Recovery science shows that recovery is deeply connected to community, relationships, and a sense of belonging.

Key Dimensions of Land-Based Healing

DIMENSION	EXAMPLES
Purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional Healing Cultural Identity Mental Wellness Addiction Treatment
Activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ceremony Harvesting Recreation Elder Teaching
Delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-led Camps Healing Spaces On-the-land Programs
Outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved Well-being Cultural Continuity Increased Self-determination

Alberta Sites with Land-Based Aspects

HOPE FOR WELLNESS can help people connect with these services. The sites below include some use of land-based methods for treatment of addiction issues for youth:

BLOOD TRIBE YOUTH WELLNESS CENTRE | Age: 12 to 17

CLEAR HILLS YOUTH TREATMENT CENTRE | Age: 12 to 17

OKISIKOW ISKWEW CENTRE | Age: 14 to 24

Family-based sites are available in other provinces.

References:

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