

Lived pathways to opioid, methamphetamine, and crack cocaine addiction recovery in rural Canada

Category: Oral Presentation

Abstract Body

Background: As we work to care for adults struggling with drug addiction during the ongoing opioid crisis, there is a need to better understand recovery pathways that work for under-represented groups. The purpose of this study is to understand lived experiences of recovery among adults who identify as opioid dependent, as well as the growing number who identify as methamphetamine or crack/cocaine dependent in rural Alberta.

Methodology: The need for this study was identified by an Indigenous Advisory Committee organized through Lethbridge City Hall. In keeping with the request of this committee, we recruited a representative samples of Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults who had made an illicit drug addiction recovery attempt in the past 3 years while living in Lethbridge (popul: ~100,000) or surrounding area. Data were collected through one-on-one interviews with 54 adults in 2022 who met these criteria. Data were analyzed for qualitative themes using a phenomenological lens, stratified by Indigenous identity, gender, and substance type.

Results: Participants were 21 to 53 years, 48% female, and 41% Indigenous. All self-identified as opioid dependent (46%), methamphetamine dependent (56%) and/or crack cocaine dependent (72%) in the past 3 years; with many struggling with more than one substance in that time frame. Three quarters were in recovery, a fifth identified as fully recovered, and 5% were in relapse. While no participants were homeless, two-thirds had experienced homelessness. All had engaged in a variety of medical, psychological, and social supports in their efforts to recover. This presentation will discuss the key supports that moved participants forward in their recovery journey, and the barriers and gaps in care that held them back while living in rural Alberta. Successful pathways differed depending on whether adults identified as Indigenous or non-Indigenous, and by the primary substance (opioid vs. stimulant) they were struggling with.

Conclusion: This study highlights key themes in the lived pathways of drug addiction recovery and relapse in a rural setting.

Key Words

- Indigenous Groups
- Opioids/Opiates
- Recovery
- Rural
- Stimulants

Learning Objective # 1

Attendees will understand key supports that promoted opioid addiction recovery among Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults living in a rural setting in Canada.

Learning Objective # 2

Attendees will learn how recovery pathways may differ for the growing number of adults struggling with methamphetamine and other illicit stimulants in rural Canada.

Reference # 1

Ciccarone D, Shoptaw S. Understanding stimulant use and use disorders in a new era. *Medical Clinics of North America* 2022 106(1):81-97. doi: 10.1016/j.mcna.2021.08.010: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34823736/>

Reference # 2

Currie CL, Wild TC, Schopflocher DP, Laing L. Illicit and prescription drug problems among urban Aboriginal adults in Canada: The role of traditional culture in protection and resilience. *Social Science and Medicine* 2013; 88:1-9. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.03.032: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953613002013?via%3Dihub>

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