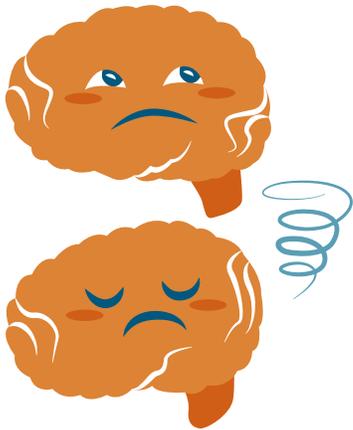


MENTAL WELLNESS



From an Indigenous perspective, mental wellness is something that can be understood holistically. Factors like physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being, as well as connection to culture, and the land all play a role in mental wellness (FNIGC, 2018). This differs from western biomedical understandings of mental health, which have mostly defined mental health as the absence of mental illness (FNIGC, 2018). Comparing mental health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations is challenging because of these cultural differences in understanding (FNIGC, 2018).

Due to the history of and ongoing processes of colonization in Canada, Indigenous women and gender-diverse people often experience high rates of adverse mental health outcomes such as, depression and anxiety. The traumatic effects of things like the residential school system, and the 60's scoop are passed down through generations and continue to be felt today. Lived realities such as poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment also contribute to adverse mental health outcomes.

What is depression?

How do you know if you or someone you know has it?

Clinical depression is a, "complex mood disorder caused by various factors, including genetic predisposition, personality, stress, and brain chemistry" (CAMH). Some signs of depression include: changes in appetite and weight, difficulty sleeping, loss of interest in activities you normally enjoy, withdrawal from friends or family members, feeling short-tempered, tiredness, trouble concentrating, suicidal thoughts, and increased anxiety (CAMH).

What is anxiety?

How do you know if you or someone you know has it?

Everyone experiences anxiety to some degree, but it is often infrequent and does not cause interference with your day-to-day activities. Anxiety can also be more severe, and cause distress, disruption, and harmfully affect multiple aspects of an individual's life. Some signs of anxiety include: anxious thoughts, irrational or extreme fear, difficulty managing daily tasks, avoidance of situations one fears, safety behaviours, etc. (CAMH).

Treatment:

There are numerous ways to treat depression and anxiety. Western approaches to treating depression include “antidepressants, cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), and psychosocial support” (NCCAH, p. 17). CBT has also been shown to be effective in treating anxiety (NCCAH[2], p. 21).

Western approaches to treating depression and anxiety are not always effective for Indigenous peoples, and some researchers advocate for culturally appropriate programming that address healing on an individual and community level. Programming that incorporates both traditional Indigenous knowledge and Western approaches have also been found to be effective (NCCAH).



Protective factors:

Despite these realities, recent data indicates that mental wellness among Indigenous populations is steadily improving. Phase 3 of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) Regional Survey indicated that, “nearly two-thirds (66.1%) of Indigenous adults reported they were “likely to be well,” while one-fifth (17.4% reported moderate to severe mental distress” (FNIGC, 2018, p. 74). Overall, the majority of Indigenous adults “rated their mental health as being good, very good, or excellent” in this survey (FNIGC, 2018, p. 72).

Indigenous people face multiple barriers to mental wellness, but research shows that despite these additional stressors, Indigenous people are resilient (NCCAH[2], 2015) A number of factors that protect against adverse mental health outcomes and promote resiliency within Indigenous populations have been identified. Protective factors include high quality social supports, spending time on the land, cultural continuity, having positive role models, and learning about culture and tradition (NCCAH[2], 2015).

While these may be protective factors for some people, it is important to remember that everyone’s mental wellness journey is unique and valid. What

works for one person may not be appropriate for another, and it might take multiple approaches before you find something that works for you. If you or someone you care about is struggling, talk to someone you trust or reach out for help:

Kid’s Help Phone: Provides anonymous and non-judgemental support to youth and teens. 1800 668 6868 www.kidshelpphone.ca

Talk 4 Healing: Free and culturally safe telephone help line for Indigenous women living in Northern Ontario. 1 855 554 HEAL www.talk4healing.com

Native Youth Crisis Hotline: 1 877 209 1266

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line: Provides culturally grounded assessment, referrals, and support in times of crisis, and suicide intervention. 1 855 242 3310

Kamatsiaqtut Help Line: Provides culturally-specific assessments and support in English or Inuktitut for those living in Nunavut or Nunavik. 1 800 265 3333



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
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