

Culturally Based Approach to Addiction Vital in North East: *North East LHIN's Addiction Services Review*

August 30, 2016 -- Spending time in the sweat lodge or in a medicine room learning traditional teachings is part of the healing journey at the Benbowopka Treatment Centre for addictions, located on the shores of Lake Huron in Blind River.

Open to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, the centre, which is funded by the North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN) and Health Canada, takes up to 16 clients for a one-month residential treatment program.

Culturally based treatment programs, such as Benbowopka's, play a vital role for First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM) people living in the region, wrote Dr. Brian Rush in his *North East Addiction Services Review*, commissioned by the NE LHIN.

"FNIM people are significantly over-represented in the treatment population. There is also a high need for culturally appropriate services and cultural safety training," explained Dr. Rush, a researcher at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), in the review's regional executive summary.

Dr. Rush undertook a comprehensive analysis of strengths, gaps, and challenges faced by Northerners accessing addiction services. Access, coordination and system sustainability are themes of the report's findings. These align with the NE LHIN's current priorities for enhanced patient care across Northeastern Ontario.



Counsellor Tracy Fraser shows a sweat lodge used in treating addiction at Benbowopka Treatment Centre (previously known as Anishnabie Naadmaagi Gamig Substance Abuse Treatment Centre). Below, Tracy and Will Bisailon, Cultural Coordinator, talk about traditional medicines in the centre's medicine room.



Dr. Rush counted Benbowopka's cultural programming, along with collaboration with its local hospital and partnership to the North Shore Tribal Council, among the North East region's strengths:

"The residential treatment service at Blind River offers a strong culture-based approach to treatment, a harm reduction philosophy, an in-kind collaborative care model with the local hospital that brings a nurse practitioner to the program once a week for medical services—including medication management—and an integrated partnership with the local North Shore Tribal Council. It also has significant training capacity that can be accessed by other programs and professionals wishing to build FNIM, culture-based treatment capacity." (page 215)

For Counsellor Tracy Fraser, joining the centre has been more of a calling than a job. She sees first hand how connecting with First Nations teachings helps their clients.

"People learn how to address their addiction through improved mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health, as well as by maintaining better balance within the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel," explained Executive Director Carol Eshkakogan.

Background:

- The NE LHIN invests more than \$22.5 million annually in addiction services, including combined funding for mental health services in integrated programs.
- Dr. Rush's addictions review for the NE LHIN contains a series of recommendations (read the [Regional Executive Summary](#) or go to www.nelhin.on.ca).
- A new NE LHIN Mental Health and Addictions Collaborative will consider these recommendations, along with Mental Health Blueprint prepared by Health Sciences North and the North Bay Regional Health Centre, and other guiding documents.
- Dr. Rush is a Scientist Emeritus and former Head of Health Systems Research at the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at CAMH and Professor in the Departments of Psychiatry and Public Health Sciences at University of Toronto.
- Among several key findings, Dr. Rush's review noted that:
 - Use of health services related to substance use in the North East is 1.5 to 2.5 times higher than the provincial average.
 - First Nations/Aboriginal/Métis people are significantly over-represented in the number of people receiving treatment, at 30 to 35%, compared to their proportion in the overall Northeastern Ontario population at 11%.
- To find out more about Benbowopka Treatment Centre, visit www.benbowopka.com.

For more information: Contact Lara Bradley, Communications Officer, at 705-674-1492 or lara.bradley@lhins.on.ca