

TRADITIONAL HEALERS

Introduction

Aboriginal concepts of health and wellness involve not only the physical but also the mental, spiritual and emotional aspects of health. This wholistic approach to health is widely accepted and practised in Aboriginal communities, through traditional medicine and healing practises such as sweatlodges, sweetgrass ceremonies, smudges, talking circles and teachings from Elders.

Historically, individuals known as “traditional healers” were known to be the experts on wholistic health practises. They were sought extensively by community members, as they were considered to have different gifts to assist individuals in maintaining a balance in health. This meant a balance between the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical aspects of health. Depending on the type of healer and his/her particular “gifts” (e.g., a medicine man, a seer, an interpreter of dreams), different aspects of health would be dealt with.

Despite historical efforts by mainstream society to obliterate various traditional healing practises and replace them with Western medical concepts of health, there is a resurgence in the use of traditional wholistic concepts of health and healing practises within the Aboriginal community.

However, the reality remains that Aboriginal communities no longer have the privilege of their ancestors. In many communities today, there are no recognized “healers”, and frontline workers lack information regarding how to access the services of traditional healers for their clients.

How can a Traditional Healer be Accessed?

Both Western medical and traditional health services can be obtained at thirteen Aboriginal health access centres (H.A.C.s) across Ontario. Eleven H.A.C.s are funded by the provincial government through the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy.

Traditional services in these centres are coordinated locally and may vary depending on the region. Health Access Centres are open to all Aboriginal and Metis people, regardless of residency.

The following is a list of the Aboriginal Health Access Centres in Ontario:

No.	NAME OF ORGANIZATION	TELEPHONE NUMBER
01	N'Minoeyaa: Community Health Access Centre Cutler, Ontario	(705) 844-2021
02	Shawanaga First Nation Nobel, Ontario	(705) 366-2378
03	Gi-zhii-a-ti-zi-wing Access Centre Fort Frances, Ontario	(807) 274-3131
04	De dwa da dehs nye>s Hamilton, Ontario	(905) 544-4320
05	Shkagamik Kwe Health Centre Sudbury, Ontario	(705) 675-1596
06	Noojimowin Teg Centre Little Current, Ontario	(705) 368-2182
07	Washagamis Bay First Nation Keewatin, Ontario	(807) 543-3946
08	Kanonkwa'tesheio:io Social Cornwall, Ontario	(613) 575-2341
09	Wabano Health Access Centre Vanier, Ontario	(613) 748-5999
10	Southern Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre London, Ontario	(519) 672-4079
11	Beendigen Inc. Thunder Bay, Ontario	(807) 622-1121
12	Anishnawbe Health Toronto* Toronto, Ontario	(416) 360-0486
13	Misiway Eniniwuk Health Centre* Timmins, Ontario	(705) 264-2200

* Not funded through AHWS

Coverage for Traditional Health Services

Medical Services Branch, through Non-Insured Health Benefits, covers some of the costs associated with the services of a traditional healer. Eligibility requirements for individuals accessing traditional health services are the same as for other M.S.B.-funded programs and services.

Allowable expenses covered for a traditional healer includes: Transportation; Meals; and, Accommodation.

The process for coverage is outlined below:

1. Prior approval is required (or it is not covered) and all requests should be sent to N.I.H.B. **two to three weeks prior** to the planned visit. The mailing address is:

N.I.H.B.
Medical Services Branch
Ontario Region
1547 Merivale Road, 3rd Floor,
Nepean, ON K1A 0L3

2. Requests for transportation to visit a traditional healer or for the healer to visit the community must include the following information:
 - i. traditional healer's name and home address (covered only if an Ontario-based address)
 - ii. the name and address of agency/community in Ontario to which the healer is coming
 - iii. a list of the clients the healer will be seeing (a minimum of five clients/day is required).
 - iv. A cost estimate for travel, meal and accommodation expenses. Medical Services Branch Ontario Region current policy on land transportation must be followed.

Please be advised that M.S.B. does not encourage individual appointments outside the community, but rather, a visit by a healer to a community, where he/she can service many individuals. There are also no limits placed on the number of times an individual sees a healer, whether in the community or off-reserve.

3. The client list must include all the following information:
 - i. client name, date of birth and Status Card number
 - ii. the *medical condition* for which each client is requiring the services of a traditional healer.
4. After the visit with the traditional healer, a “*Confirmation of Visit to Traditional Healer*” form must be submitted to Medical Services Branch, stating that the client was seen and the date of the visit. This must be submitted with the invoice prior to reimbursement for travel. These forms are available from M.S.B. for frontline workers.

Please note that failure to follow the above process may jeopardize funding by Medical Services Branch.

What services are not covered by Medical Services Branch?

Ceremonies or rites of passage conducted by traditional healers are not covered by M.S.B..

Services for areas such as grieving or stress are not covered either, as they are not considered a *medical condition*. However, symptoms such as anxiety, headaches or digestive problems, all of which contribute to either grief or stress, *do* constitute a *medical condition* and are, therefore covered.

Mental health illnesses or emotional problems due to mental illnesses are considered a medical condition and are covered.

Verifying Qualifications of Traditional Healers

Historically, Aboriginal people did not keep lists of traditional healers nor did they have to verify their abilities, as there were sufficient traditional healers in every community. Today, however, as the number of qualified traditional healers has significantly dropped, there are many communities and organizations which do not want to utilize the services of or recommend a traditional healer they do not know.

Neither the federal nor the provincial government keeps a list of recognized traditional healers. This task has been left up to the individual community and/or organization to

develop. Each community or organization is also responsible for setting up a protocol or policy for recruiting traditional healers.

The recruitment process outlined below is an example from the Toronto-based Community Health Access Centre, Anishnawbe Health. Communities may choose to use this process or develop their own, based on this framework.

Process for Recruiting Traditional Healers at Anishnawbe Health Toronto

Anishnawbe Health Toronto currently utilizes the services of sixteen traditional healers from across the province, who provide services to Aboriginal clients. The recruitment process is as follows:

1. An informal networking process is used through the healers. Recognized healers are asked to recommend other healers known to them.
2. Questions asked about the specific healer include:
Have you used his/her services in the past?
Do you know others who have sought this healer?
What were the results of the healer's work?
3. Information on how to contact the healer is obtained. After contacting the healer, a time is arranged to visit and talk with him/her in his/her own community and see what he/she does.
4. If the traditional healer is considered by the organization for future services, he/she is informed of the reference process. This process includes checking with his/her own community the degree of recognition of his/her knowledge and skills, and any other feedback community members may want to provide.
5. Once the reference checks are made, the name of the healer is added on to the current list of traditional healers.

Please be advised that Anishnawbe Health Toronto will not reproduce their list of traditional healers but are willing to provide information on specific healers that a community or organization may have inquires about.