

# Building a Trauma Informed Aftercare Network in Saskatchewan-

Supporting Women and Children Who Participate in Treatment at the Family Treatment Centre in Prince Albert



Between May and November 2017, service providers in Saskatchewan met four times in combined web-based and face-to-face meetings at the Family Treatment Centre in Prince Albert to discuss what we know about aftercare for women who have completed treatment for substance use problems, and what opportunities exist for enhancing aftercare in a trauma-informed way, for women leaving the Family Treatment Centre.

## Mothers with Substance Use Problems

Mothers and pregnant women with substance use problems face multiple barriers in accessing support and treatment services including shame and guilt about their substance use, lack of childcare limiting their ability to participate or attend treatment, limited financial resources, lack of transportation, limited family or social support, and fear of child welfare involvement. In previous research with women with substance use concerns in various settings across Canada, women have reported negative experiences with health care providers which further deters women from accessing care. Research has also shown that many mothers and pregnant women, including those who have experienced gender-based violence, often do not feel safe in many treatment and program settings.

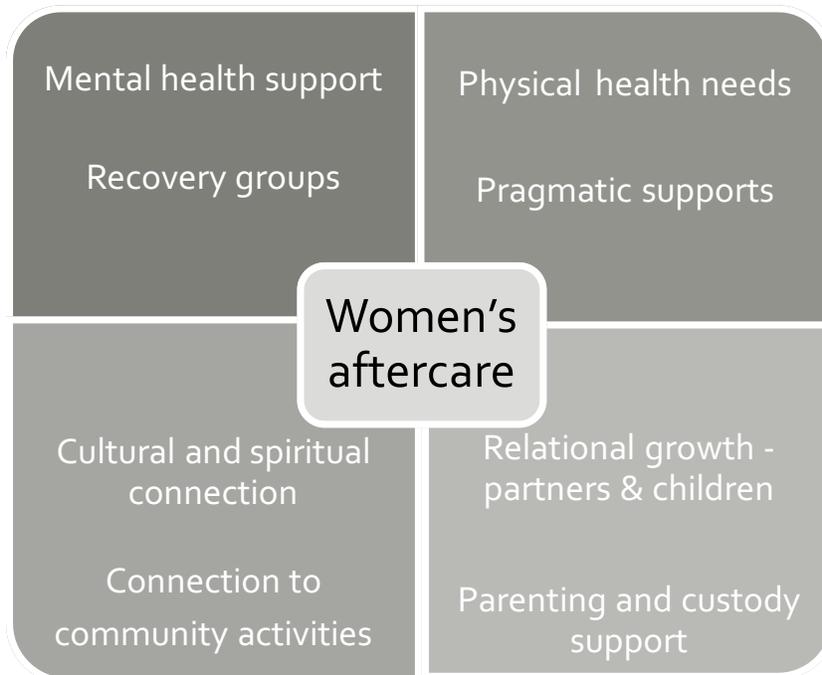
Many women who use substances also struggle with significant physical and mental health problems. Chronic health conditions such as diabetes, respiratory conditions such as asthma, and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety require ongoing support from both primary health care providers as well as specialists. As well, many women require support in connecting to community resources that will help them to build and maintain healthy, independent family lives, including finding safe and affordable housing, parenting support and child care options, assistance finding employment or achieving other educational and vocational goals, and support in re-establishing or developing new relationships with family members and others within their communities.

## Holistic and Gender Responsive Treatment at the Family Treatment Centre

Women repeatedly report that fear of losing their children is one of the most significant barriers to treatment. The Family Treatment Centre is a residential inpatient facility in Prince Albert Saskatchewan that allows mothers to access integrated addiction treatment with their children, that also provides services for their physical health and parenting needs. The Centre's philosophy is holistic and gender responsive and recognizes the need to provide trauma informed care. A goal of treatment is to provide strategies and support that will reduce the negative impacts of substance use on their lives and the lives of their children.

## Women's Aftercare Needs

The group discussed the range of supports that women need in the aftercare period (summarized in the matrix below) related to mental health, physical health, cultural/spiritual connection and relational supports.



## Aftercare Tailored for Indigenous Women

During the meetings, cultural and spiritual connection was identified as an important component of women's aftercare. The research discussed in this section is intended to supplement the important points made by service providers on the unique needs of Indigenous women and to help further the development and planning of culturally relevant aftercare services.

Cultural aftercare is defined as "life-long, holistic support from a range of service providers as well as community and social supports...to help people and their families or other loved ones along their healing journey and to return to positive community life." (*Cultural Aftercare Guidebook*, p. 2). Cultural aftercare can include visits with Elders, re-learning language, healing/sharing circles, sweat lodge, beading, hunting/fishing, and berry picking. It also includes community supports and activities that contribute to developing a sense of hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose such as employment training, educational opportunities, supports to overcome low self-confidence, and skill building related to re-establishing relationships with family, children, and community. Cultural aftercare integrates community cultural knowledge, community involvement, and Western therapy approaches.

The Thunderbird Partnership Foundation encourages planning for four levels of cultural aftercare (p.35):

- **Level 1: Basic Living Needs** – food, shelter, companionship, finances, education, child care/protection, traditional healer, etc.
- **Level 2: Personal Care Needs**– language, socializing, life skills, daily rituals, etc.
- **Level 3: Family/Community Care Needs** – reconnection, volunteering, ceremonies, etc.
- **Level 4: Extended Care Needs** – ceremonies, feasts, medical, home/palliative care, etc.

## Aftercare that is Trauma Informed

It is important that trauma informed support be offered by all types of service providers in the aftercare period. Individual counselling and support is one strategy for helping individuals heal from trauma. However, there are many other ways that service providers and community organizations can directly and indirectly support healing from trauma for women.

*What do we mean by trauma informed approaches by service providers who provide aftercare?*

### Create Safety

Safety is a critical component of healing from traumatic experiences. In order to successfully engage with services, women need to feel they are out of immediate danger. Creating physical, emotional, and cultural safety can include ensuring a welcoming physical environment, providing clear information about program activities, and having consistent and predictable interactions with service providers. In many areas of practice, women-only spaces and women-only programming can be important. For mothers and caregivers, support on how to create safety at home for their family members can also be helpful.

### Help Women Balance Multiple Roles

Services that take into account women's multiple roles as mothers, caregivers, community members, employees and paid workers, students, and more are more likely to meet women's individual needs. Many women can benefit from learning about self-care and its role in helping to heal from substance use, trauma and other related issues while other women are interested in healing relationships in their lives that have been affected by their experiences of trauma.

### Promote Women's Self-Determination

Trauma-informed practice emphasizes choice, voice and control. At an individual level, women are given choices about what services they receive and are able to make decisions about their own level of participation and the pacing of these services. At a program level, service providers create opportunities within services to build self-esteem and self-confidence, to involve women in service development and evaluation, and encourage women to connect with each other as role models and mentors. At an organizational level, promoting self-determination also means paying attention to social justice issues, including strategies to address gender inequity.

### Wellness Activities and Skill Building

Many women find that engaging in wellness activities and developing new skills to care for themselves and families are important in continuing their healing and remaining healthy following treatment. Educational and employment opportunities can provide a sense of belonging and meaning while engaging in activism or learning about spirituality can provide a sense of connection and promote self-confidence. For many women, collective approaches to healing are an alternative or complement to other individualized approaches. Self-expression through the arts such as film-making and music can be healing for many women and can help women come together to understand the common forces that have shaped their experiences. Community events and activities can be a way of marking anniversaries of events that affected the entire community and support positive social connections. For Indigenous women, cultural activities such as berry picking, sewing circles, and ceremonial and social feast can be helpful. Service providers can recognize the importance of indirect and more holistic approaches to supporting healing for women by creating space for community events, making referrals, and encouraging women to find their own pathways to healing.

## Discussion Questions for Saskatchewan services assisting women who have been to treatment

In the meetings service providers reflected on their practice. The following questions may be useful for continuing reflection on how to enhance trauma informed practice going forth:

1. What are some of the ways your program works to create physical, emotional, and cultural safety? What else could you be doing to make your program safe and welcoming for everyone?
2. What strengths and challenges do you see in your work with women?
3. In what ways are you signalling to women that they will not be judged for having substance use problems when they access help from your service? In what ways can this be improved?
4. What role do traditional cultural practices have in supporting growth and healing in the aftercare period?
5. Trauma can impact many aspects of a woman's life, identity, relationships, feelings, thoughts and behaviours. How can your service, directly or indirectly, create opportunities for healing in each of these areas?
6. Many mothers and pregnant women who use substances experience numerous barriers to accessing care and support, including discrimination and negative attitudes from health care providers. What are you currently doing to help create a sense of welcome and safety for women in your community? What else could you be doing?

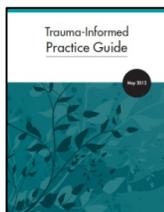
## Recommendations for Future Action

Three key recommendations that would build on the work of this project are:

- Hold webmeetings with service providers in each of the 4 aftercare areas (identified in the matrix above) to talk about how women who have completed treatment can be connected to them
- With involvement of women in recovery, design and pilot aftercare groups for women that have the potential to address the 4 areas of aftercare support, and use a trauma informed and cultural approach
- We were able to identify very few trauma specific counselling services for women currently available in Saskatchewan. It will be important to work with Saskatchewan agencies to make a list of where such support is available in the province

## Key Resources:

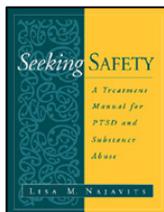
The following are resources that were discussed in the meetings and/or may be of interest to those planning aftercare services that are culturally relevant and trauma informed:



### Trauma informed Practice Guide (2013)

This Guide was developed on for the BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council in consultation with researchers, practitioners and health system planners across BC. The TIP Guide and Organizational Checklist support the translation of trauma-informed principles into practice. Included are concrete strategies to guide the professional work of practitioners assisting clients with mental health and substance use concerns. 97 pages.

[bccewh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013\\_TIP-Guide.pdf](http://bccewh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013_TIP-Guide.pdf)



### Seeking Safety

Created by Lisa Najavits, Seeking Safety is a widely used curriculum for Stage I trauma support. There are 25 topics that can be presented individually and in any order. The focus is on creating safety and recognizing the connection between substance use and trauma. It has been used in a variety of settings and with both men and women, as well as with youth. There have been many evaluations providing strong research support for its value in addressing PTSD/substance abuse. \$60 US for the book, multiple translations and supplementary resources available for purchase.

[www.seekingsafety.org](http://www.seekingsafety.org)



### Cultural Aftercare Guidebook (2011)

This guidebook developed by the National Native Addiction Partnership Foundation (Now Thunderbird Partnership Foundation) as a renewal opportunity identified in the Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations in Canada. The guidebook provides guidance to ensure that Indigenous culture is used to support the way community workers provide aftercare services to Indigenous individuals, families, and communities.

<http://thunderbirdpf.org/napf-document-library/>



### Connecting with Culture, Growing our Wellness Activity Guide (2014)

The *Connecting with Culture: Growing Our Wellness* resource is comprised by the Facilitators Handbook and accompanying Client Activity Guide. The guide aims to introduce service providers and their clients to a step-by-step process that supports engagement with what Indigenous culture means for client wellness.

[https://cyfn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Growing-Wellness-Activity\\_Guide\\_DIGITAL\\_FILE.pdf](https://cyfn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Growing-Wellness-Activity_Guide_DIGITAL_FILE.pdf)



### Mothering Project Video

This video about the Mothering Project in Winnipeg explores how a community program works with substance using pregnant women and new mothers on their journey of self-discovery, healing and belonging.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2YBbOgF7TA>

## Thanks to the following organizations which participated in the discussions

- Family Treatment Centre, SHA
- Government of Saskatchewan, Ministry of Health
- Centre of Responsibility (COR) Prince Albert
- Kids First (Prince Albert and Yorkton)
- Saskatchewan Health Authority - Prince Albert (Access Place, Brief and Social Detox, MHADS Outpatients, Obstetrics)
- Saskatchewan Health Authority – Regina (Social Detox Program)
- FNIHB: IRS NNADAP program consultant
- Saskatchewan Health Authority – Saskatoon (MHADS Outpatients)
- Prince Albert Cooperative Health Centre
- Saskatchewan Health Authority – Melfort (MHADS Outpatients)
- Saskatchewan Health Authority – Laronge (MHADS Outpatients)
- Saskatchewan Health Authority – Fond Du Lac (MHADS Outpatients)
- Northern Lights Casino
- Valley Hill Youth Treatment Centre
- Saskatchewan Prevention Network

This Resource was developed for the Trauma/ Gender/ Substance Use (TGS) project. This project has received financial assistance from Health Canada. The views herein do not necessarily represent those of Health Canada.



For more information and additional resources visit: [www.bcccewh.bc.ca](http://www.bcccewh.bc.ca)