

## Talking Circle Intervention

### Background & Goal

The health status of American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous youth globally is below that of the general youth population, with striking differences in areas including depression, suicide, anxiety, and substance abuse. The death rate for American Indian/Alaska Native youth is twice that for youth of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Early substance use is associated with antisocial behavior, conduct disorder, other mental health disorders, and school failure. While the economic costs of substance abuse to the American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous communities are significant, the human costs are even greater, with substance abuse and health-compromising behaviors during youth underlying many major causes of American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous morbidity and mortality.

American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous youth have the earliest age of initiation of alcohol use and the highest rates of binge drinking. By the twelfth grade, 80% of American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous youth are active drinkers. In addition, American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous youth are more likely than other youth to have used methamphetamines, with a 6-fold increase in use in just the past 2 years. While current data on the rate of prescription drug abuse among American Indian/Alaska Native youth is limited, these populations have significantly higher reported rates of non-medical prescription drug use. Dr. John Lowe, PhD, RN, FAAN, developed Talking Circle Intervention for the prevention and early intervention of substance abuse and other health risk behaviors engaged in by American Indian/Alaska Native youth nationally and Indigenous youth internationally.



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### Project Description

The talking circle is a tradition among American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous people, and continues in practice today. Through use of this symbolic tradition, Dr. Lowe has enabled American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous youth to use the support and insight of each other to move away from harmful behaviors, such as substance abuse, and to move toward something positive. American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous people consider the whole greater than the sum of its parts and believe that healing and transformation should take place in the presence of a group since all people are related to one another in very basic ways. Each participant of the talking circles serves an important and necessary function that is valued no more or no less than any other being. Through the Talking Circle intervention, the traditional sense of belonging is fostered and participants experience healing or cleansing. Dr. Lowe has also developed and tested the Virtual Talking Circle intervention where, through the use of video-conferencing technology, the Talking Circle intervention is now being delivered to multiple American Indian/Alaska Native communities throughout the United States.

### Evidence of Success

- The Talking Circle intervention is guided by a theoretical framework and model, Native-Reliance, and measured by the Native-Reliance Questionnaire.
- The outcome of implementing the Talking Circle (TC) as compared to Standard Education (SE) for substance abuse prevention and early intervention consistently demonstrates effectiveness for decreasing substance use involvement among various American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous populations, e.g. National Institute on Drug Abuse substance abuse scores between TC and SE groups were significantly different and there was a significant interaction effect between time and group.
- American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous communities where the Talking Circle intervention is being implemented are reporting a positive impact on their economies due to the decrease in costs associated with substance abuse.
- The Talking Circle intervention studies provide employment for people from local American Indian/Alaska Native and Indigenous communities.
- The use of technology to implement and deliver the Virtual Talking Circle intervention is enhancing education and economic development while preserving and strengthening American Indian/Alaska Native cultural traditions.
- The Talking Circle intervention has received recognition from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Programs as an evidence-based program affecting juvenile well-being.

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