

# In Oregon traditional Native healing practices now covered by insurance

The federal government has expanded both Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, CHIP, for practices that would include sweat lodges and drumming, in Oregon and three other Western states.

Jen Procter Andrews, of the Coquille Tribe, is a member of the Portland Area Indian Health Board. She called it a fantastic development which will address issues specific to Native communities.

"Native women die from pregnancy-related causes at twice the rate of white women and native infants die in their first year of life at a nearly twice the rate of white infants," Ms. Andrews said.

"And our populations experience higher levels of other health issues like chronic liver disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, unintentional injuries, and the list could go on.

"But the expected result is better quality health and health outcomes in tribal communities really by improving access to culturally appropriate health care."

Access to cultural and ceremonial practices has been increasingly used in a number of settings where Native people live and work. Some advocates say being treated for illness and

*The sweat lodge is seen as a way to physically and spiritually detoxify, while drumming can replicate the heartbeat one first hears as an infant...*

injury with a more culturally relevant focus can improve outcomes.

This is also in light of historical trauma, which includes colonization, disease, displacement from traditional lands, and the boarding school era.

Andrews said this openness to incorporate Native American values and ties to the land is important. It also allows healing practices involving communal gatherings or plants to become more accepted among Western medical practitioners.

"We see this in elder care facilities where community engagement is encouraged, or where many of our medicines are produced based on traditional plant medicine," she said.

"So there are hints of it here and there, but I think it's definitely encouraging for being able to break open that wider concept of what health really means."

Many Native Americans find value in the plants their ancestors used for maladies, including forbs for headaches, sage for cleansing the soul of negativity, and sting-

ing nettle for stomach pain.

Sweating inside a traditional sweat lodge is seen as a way to physically and spiritually detoxify, while drumming replicates the heartbeat one first hears as an infant, and ties the listener to the earth.

Advocates say there's more work to be done in incorporating traditional Native American healing practices into Western medicine, which has potential. But stigma and views of this approach being an "alternative medicine" remain a challenge.

The expansion for Medicaid and CHIP is on a pilot basis. It's set to expire at the end of September 2027, unless extended.

Andrews is hopeful that it will continue.

"Our indigeneity is unique because it encompasses the past and present treatment of indigenous peoples and includes the connection between health outcomes and the environment in which we live," she said.

"Indigenous peoples' environment, the deep-rooted cultural beliefs, and other components that are not usually found in our current, frankly colonial approaches to healthcare." The Coquille Tribe operates several health clinics, including one in Eugene, well beyond its traditional territory.

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