



# HEALTH & WELLNESS NEWS

May is...

**Mental Health Awareness Month**

**What is Mental Health?**

**Mental Health is..**

- Important
- Something everyone has
- Intrinsicly linked to physical health
- On a continuum
- Worth making time for
- Part of being human
- Something we need to look after
- Positive & Negative
- Changeable
- Complex

**Mental Health isn't..**

- A sign of weakness
- Shameful
- All in your head
- Always negative
- Something you choose to have
- Something you can snap out of
- Something to think about only when it feels broken
- An interchangeable term with mental illness
- Feeling good all the time
- Fixed

This information is provided to you by the Indigenous Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health). The purpose of this grant is to foster culturally responsive models to support and promote the wellness of children and families.

## Let's Remove Stigma! Words CAN Hurt

Why is brown skin considered "dirty" by some non-brown people?  
 Why is talk about sex considered "dirty"?  
 Why is a positive urine analysis called "dirty"?  
 Finally, why do we associate dirt with negative things?  
 In fact, "dirt" is soil. We grow many foods in soil. Without soil, we would all die sooner or later. At one time, all of our tilixam knew "dirt" only as part of our Grandmother Earth. There is nothing dirty about our Grandmother Earth. She keeps all of creation healthy by allowing the plants to grow within her soil. We cannot live without oxygen. We cannot live without foods. We cannot live without the medicines.

Great! So can we all agree that dirt is not a bad thing? Sadly, there are those ashamed of their beautiful brown skin because as a child, kids teased about their "dirty skin." There are people who were told as kids to "stop talking dirty." Those adults may have uncomfortable feelings or may refuse to talk about sex. So many things can happen as a child that you do not realize can affect you as an adult.

Finally, to our people who are addicted to drugs or alcohol, using the term "dirty UA" can bring out negative feelings. Addiction is a disease! Diabetes is also a disease. If a diabetic tests positive for sugar or protein in their urine, we certainly do not say, "You have a dirty UA!" Yet, we continue to use the term to describe urine that indicates the presence of certain drugs. Nowadays, it's not even a dirty UA, a person is just told, "You are dirty or you tested dirty." In the same way, calling someone a "drunk," a "junkie" or "crazy" is harmful. Better to see them as a human being who needs help.

Stigma is an attitude, belief or behavior that discriminates against people. A few words with lots of stigma attached to them are *dirty, drunk, junkie, homeless, user, addict, clean and sober*. As Native people, we can make the change to remove the stigma. If you hear someone talking about a "dirty UA," remind them that it is not dirty it is just positive for certain substances. A "junkie" is a human being who has a disease called addiction. Stigma prevents many people from seeking behavioral health services where addiction treatment can be found.

Think about words that you might have heard that have stigma attached. As Native people, we have experienced discrimination and stigma as a people. Let's end stigma on the Rez! Let's change our words so we do not harm others or prevent them from seeking help.

If you or someone you know has a substance use disorder or a mental health need, please call the ye?lan tilixam haws at 503-879-1389. The ye?lan tilixam haws is also known as the Helper Person Office. There is no stigma attached to this office; we simply want to help. ■

**NORTHWEST PORTLAND AREA INDIAN HEALTH BOARD**  
 Indian Leadership for Indian Health

3.25.21

**Elder Voices Supporting the Covid Vaccine**

"Here at Makah, my aunt tested positive for COVID, she is the eldest in our tribe. Also, our only Doctor at our clinic tested positive for COVID, and he has been battling it for well over a month. With that in mind, my choice was easy, to vaccinate in order to make our little village [be] that much more safe." -Nate Tyler, Makah Tribal Council.

"We need to help protect Our People from dying. So, if they do become exposed [to COVID-19], with a vaccine, we do not have to lose them." -Delegate from the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, THD, Marilyn Scott.

"I was not hesitant [to get the vaccine] at all. I was more fearful of NOT getting the vaccine. We got the vaccine at Chemawa and they were so helpful, friendly, and efficient. They made you feel good. They answered questions before you asked."  
**Did you have any side effects?** "I was lucky, I was good. I'm 81 years old, so I don't know why. Only a little arm soreness." -Marie Sagaberd, Lummi & Quinalt Elder.

"For me, I knew it was a decision between life as I know it now, or the possibility of being on a respirator and possibly dying alone and struggling for that final breath. As a 69-year-old, my side effects were extremely mild. I was a little bit sleepy the next day, but that was gone by the afternoon."  
**"Overall, I considered this a good experience. It brought back hope for the future. I wish everyone would choose life and science by getting this vaccine."** -Harriette Cheeka, Makah Elder.

"I have been a nurse for 40 years. I am very pro-vaccine, for myself and others. And, I do it for my Tribe, the Makah. I was not concerned at all. I know the vaccine had been through trials for safety and efficacy."  
**What would you tell others?** "I would [tell them] of my positive experience, I would assure them it is safe. And, I remind them of the possible effect of getting COVID - severe illness or even death." -Terri Markishtum, Makah Elder and nurse.

*Phrases to Reduce Stress*

I will not hesitate, I will just do what I need to do.

I will accept what I cannot control.

With every deep breath I take, I feel myself becoming more calm.

I accept myself as I am.

I've done more than enough today.

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