

**Integrating Healing Lodges into Canada's Correctional System to Mitigate Recidivism**

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**Author Note**

This paper was completed for LAWS 4003: Research Project, instructed by Sunny Mangat synchronously at the New Westminster campus.

This paper is 6,595 words and was submitted on April 04, 2025.

### **Abstract**

This study investigates how Canada's correctional system employs the healing lodges for Indigenous offender rehabilitation programs. This analysis underlines the necessity of developing indigenous-friendly rehabilitation initiatives that treat the core causes of the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples within the Canadian criminal justice system. The research shows that healing lodges lead to a substantial decrease in reoffending rates compared to conventional correctional facilities. The complete potential of healing lodges remains limited by various systemic barriers, such as strict eligibility requirements coupled with insufficient funding and insufficient Indigenous self-governance control. Policy reforms must include the different and varied security offender program expansion supplemented with steady funding sources and complete Indigenous autonomy in healing lodge administration operations. Future studies must concentrate on how long-term offenders reintegrate into society while investigating rehabilitative needs that are unique to Indigenous People in Canada. Healing lodges must be positioned as a central element in Canadian justice system operations to mitigate prisoner reoffending patterns while promoting Indigenous self-governance and achieving robust reconciliation aims in Canada.

*Keywords:* Healing lodges, Canada, recidivism, overrepresentation, Indigenous rehabilitation, federal correctional system, Indigenous self-governance.

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## **Integrating Healing Lodges into Canada's Correctional System to Mitigate Recidivism**

### **Background Information**

The overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's correctional system has soared significantly due to the existence of underlying systemic and colonial injustices. Indigenous People make up 27% of federal prisons although they only represent a meagre 4% of the total Canadian population (Hamilton, 2019). The disproportionate incarceration stems from historical and continued marginalization rather than merely a statistical aberration (Cunneen & Tauri, 2019). Such overrepresentation and increased recidivism of Indigenous Peoples warrants urgent attention since it is a pressing issue that must be explored through a culturally relevant lens of rehabilitation through healing lodges. Indigenous sovereignty has been progressively undermined due to the implementation of colonial policies, including the Indian Act, disenfranchisement, intergenerational trauma and forced displacement (Asadullah et al., 2020; Cambell & Wellman, 2020).

The correctional system in Canada has failed to address the underlying issues rather, it has led to a manifestation of perpetuating social injustices in the country and has further failed to incorporate culturally relevant rehabilitation strategies. The studies have indicated that as compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts, Indigenous offenders frequently face harsher sentences, lower rates of parole, and insufficient rehabilitative training (Clifford, 2019).

Healing lodges were introduced as an alternative to traditional correctional facilities to address the structural inequalities and foster reconciliation amongst Indigenous Peoples. To rehabilitate offenders in a comprehensive and community-focused setting, healing lodges integrate Indigenous traditions, spirituality, customs and cultural beliefs (Hamilton, 2019). Further, the research primarily focuses on recidivism reduction in Indigenous communities, yet it

draws attention to gender-specific aspects. The completion rate of cultural programs at Healing lodges reaches 55% for Indigenous women, whereas men achieve a meagre 15%. Further, there is a striking distinction between 12% and 21% rates of new offence readmissions for men and women, respectively. Hence, the healing lodges demonstrate that this approach works better for female inmates (Hanby et al., 2022).

The issues revolving around underfunding, poor implementation into the larger penal system, and governmental limitations on Indigenous-led governance have continuously undermined the efficacy of these lodges (Nwaeke, 2024). The assessment of the effectiveness of healing lodges in lowering recidivism and fostering Indigenous recovery necessitates an understanding of their operation within the correctional system of Canada.

### **Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study**

The disproportionate overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's prisons highlights the mainstream punitive policies which have consistently failed to effectively tackle the particular historical, social, and cultural challenges experienced by Indigenous peoples (Wise et al., 2024). Indigenous offenders are inclined to re-offend since these individuals are incarcerated in rigid correctional facilities with no culturally appropriate rehabilitation programs. Such overrepresentation cannot mitigate their systemic issues, but it exaggerates their alienation from their cultural heritage (Hamilton, 2019).

The incorporation of Indigenous spirituality, customs and integrative healing methods into Canada's criminal justice system, through the advent of healing lodges provides an alternative rehabilitative strategy. Healing lodges are underutilized, underfunded and grossly misunderstood instead of their long-term potential in reducing recidivism in Indigenous Peoples. Cameron et al. (2021) provide the systemic constraints including stringent eligibility

requirements for healing lodges, lack of government funding and uneven policy implementations significantly hamper the effectiveness of healing lodges in Canada.

### **Research Question**

How can healing lodges be effectively integrated into Canada's correctional system to mitigate recidivism among Indigenous offenders?

### **Rationale**

The research is based on the imminent need to reform current punitive systems because Indigenous People continue to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system in Canada. The healing lodges operate as community-based facilities which align with Indigenous justice principles to promote healing instead of punishment in a manner that emphasizes restoration and reintegration (Hamilton, 2019). The lack of exploitation of healing lodges stems from the limitations imposed by governments, the shortage of funding and restrictive eligibility standards (Nwaeke, 2024). The research evaluates the role of healing lodges by assessing existing policies, operational challenges and successful practices to establish optimal integration within correctional institutions. Traditional healing practices based on nature, which Indigenous communities used historically, remain barred from the punitive correctional system in Canada (Ambtman-Smith et al., 2024).

### **Main Argument and Scope of Study**

Healing lodges provides a culturally responsive solution that shows high effectiveness but faces low use because of limited availability, budget deficits, and insufficient Indigenous governance control. Fundamental financial support along with proper correctional integration and Indigenous self-leadership management positions Healing lodges to generate substantial reductions in repeated offences and enhance criminal rehabilitation while building sustainable

reentry success for offenders. The research evaluates statistical evidence of healing lodges in Canada's justice system while exploring policy obstacles and best practices to enhance their institutional role. The study shall elevate and offer a nuanced understanding of healing lodges and assess their effectiveness in mitigating recidivism while offering cultural rehabilitation. This research will offer an extensive evaluation of healing lodges along with their operational barriers and policy recommendations that target access enhancement through Indigenous leadership involvement in its efficacy.

### **Literature Review**

The research examines essential themes from literature studies regarding how healing lodges minimize reoffending rates among Indigenous offenders in Canada. This review examines peer-reviewed research to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses along with the shared views about healing lodges' contributions to Canadian rehabilitative efforts.

### **Historical Injustices and Overrepresentation of Indigenous Offenders**

Numerous studies demonstrate how systemic and historical factors cause Indigenous peoples to disproportionately fill Canadian correctional facilities (Hamilton, 2019). The institutional policies of the Indian Act, residential schools and forced removals fostered intergenerational trauma causing economic deprivation among Indigenous Peoples (Cunneen & Tauri, 2019). Experts in the field agree that the government policies conducted deliberate destruction of Indigenous self-governance, and separation from cultural identities while creating an economically deprived environment that leads to high imprisonment rates (Morin et al., 2022).

The literature maintains a persistent debate revolving around strict Canadian criminal justice policies that increase Indigenous incarceration rates, striking beyond their fundamental



causes. Studies about correctional models are incomplete because they neglect to examine which existing models could become more effective after merging culturally appropriate rehabilitation practices (Tetrault, 2023). Nwaeke (2024) maintains that traditional prisons fail to transform Indigenous offenders since they lack Indigenous knowledge and fail to incorporate trauma healing protocols. The current circumstances of healing lodges restrict their ability to minimize Indigenous inmate overrepresentation despite offering some benefits (Clifford, 2019).

Studies have insufficiently analyzed the relationship between police procedures and the excessive numbers of Indigenous people in correctional facilities. The existing literature strongly emphasizes sentencing discrimination and rehabilitation programs yet neglects studies on the factors behind Indigenous excess incarceration related to policies, racial profiling and arrest patterns (Hamilton, 2019). A comprehensive understanding of Indigenous correctional system entry and prevention needs insight into both controlling factors and initial preventive measures which shall reduce recidivism and overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples.

### **Effectiveness of Healing Lodges in Reducing Recidivism**

Healing lodges achieve superior recidivism outcomes compared to standard correctional establishments (Wise et al., 2024). Research indicates that Indigenous offenders at healing lodges have recidivism rates while the recidivism rate for federal prison inmates is high (Hamilton, 2019). The implementation of Elder mentorship programs coupled with land-based healing activities and culturally appropriate programming demonstrates essential value for sustaining transformative behavioural changes (Morin et al., 2022, Ward, 2024).

The literature shows a significant missing element regarding the extended tracking of Healing Lodge participants after their discharge into the community. Research studies primarily investigate short-term criminal behaviour readjustment yet fail to monitor extended prisoner

integration achievements in the long run (Legault and Bleau, 2025). The issue remains unresolved regarding whether healing lodges should accept higher-security Indigenous offenders, while the present criteria of healing lodges have offered access to minimum-security offenders (Cameron et al., 2021). A division exists among researchers wherein few argue that evaluating the benefits of expanding eligibility criteria to achieve better rehabilitation results is significant while certain researchers question security risks and operational obstacles.

The research poses a significant concern that Healing Lodge participants lack sufficient support before their release from incarceration. The rehabilitation services that healing lodges offer incarcerated Indigenous people remain ineffective since they lack essential programs for transitional support, job training and housing stability once release occurs (Morin et al., 2022). To achieve greater rehabilitation success rates in addition to decreased recidivism rates post-release, the expansion of Indigenous-led parole programs and transitional healing spaces would prove beneficial altogether (Wise et al., 2024). There exists minimal research on both implementation methods for these programs along with government support availability to reduce recidivism.

### **Culturally Responsive Justice and Cultural Rehabilitation**

The healing lodges establish a legal approach that pursues restorative justice rather than punitive punishments (Wise et al., 2024). The healing lodges offer different programs compared to traditional jails since their prime focus is based on holistic recovery by restoring cultural identity while conducting traditional ceremonies and using land-based practices (Hamilton, 2019). Multiple researchers confirmed that Indigenous offenders achieve stronger personal transformation when re-establishing their cultural ties (Morin et al., 2022).

The research discusses whether healing lodges should continue operating independently or should join standard correctional systems. Scholarly opinions differ about the effectiveness of using Indigenous traditions inside federal prisons to increase rehabilitation success rates because some experts maintain that healing lodges need their self-governance to protect cultural authenticity (Tetrault, 2023). Federal institutions that rely on punitive measures with solitary confinement face direct conflict because their security protocols coupled with solitary confinement create worse mental health conditions and increase criminal behaviour patterns (Legault & Bleau, 2025). Studies have established that Indigenous defendants who undergo Elder-guided healing activities along with smudging rituals and traditional land activities present both emotional resilience and reduced hostile behaviours (Tetrault, 2023).

The argument exists that the federal integration of healing lodges would provide essential resources and management support to extend their services to more Indigenous offenders (Clifford, 2019). The integration of land-based healing practices and cultural programs in federal penitentiaries would improve Indigenous recidivism but may get obstructed because of institutional restrictions (Ambtman-Smith et al., 2024). Future research focused on policy evaluation needs to address this question until conclusive findings become available.

### **Systemic Barriers, Funding Gaps, and Policy Constraints**

The literature currently lacks information about the clear allocation of funding in the federal correctional system. Studies demonstrate healing lodges get reduced government funds than federal prisons, but no clear information exists about budget arrangements distribution patterns or funding determinants (Morin et al., 2022). The examination of budgets through financial audits and correctional analysis would reveal precise patterns of funding inequalities and resource mismanagement (Wise et al., 2024).

Healing lodges have failed to overcome numerous institutional barriers which restrict both financial stability and policy implementation for healing lodges (Legault & Bleau, 2025). The existing underfunding of healing lodges limits their extension of services due to a shortage of funds needed for capacity growth and infrastructure advancement (Clifford, 2019). Studies prove healing lodges produce more effective rehabilitation success, but complex policies grant federal correctional institutions higher budgets (Hamilton, 2019). Correctional Service Canada, through its exclusionary eligibility criteria, denies healing lodges access to maximum-security offenders (Cameron et al., 2021). The exclusion of Indigenous inmates with high-security classifications who face the highest trauma levels and addiction problems from healing lodges highlights a crucial policy issue since these facilities demonstrate the best effectiveness in rehabilitation (Tetrault, 2023). Specifically, high-risk offenders require extensive staffing and funding per offender in the healing lodges, however, underfunding in healing lodges inhibits its expansion to maximum-security classification, which has been elaborated in the Results section of the paper.

The academic analysis of healing lodges distinguishes different views on how the healing lodges can be incorporated into the Canadian justice system either through complete institutional integration or through independent Indigenous administration. Environmental science research presents a split perspective on government integration for healing lodges, where long-term sustainability benefits against bureaucracy problems (Legault & Bleau, 2025). The research must oversee the efficacy interdependence of governmental financial support to healing lodges and Indigenous self-determination to achieve financial stability and preserve cultural independence.

### **Indigenous Self-Governance and Control in Healing Lodges**

The main argument throughout the research literature focuses on the impact of Indigenous governance on correctional rehabilitation programs. Studies confirm that healing lodges led by Indigenous people deliver superior rehabilitation results in comparison to facilities under the Control of Correctional Service Canada (Hamilton, 2019). The pursuit of governance by Indigenous communities creates correctional facilities that maintain authentic cultural values and generate powerful community ties, as well as offer better community reintegration assistance in contrast to facilities managed by Correctional Service Canada (Tetrault, 2023).

Healing lodges experience control interference from Correctional Service Canada that restricts Indigenous communities from developing Indigenous justice systems (Legault & Bleau, 2025). The government's control creates obstacles for healing lodges because it focuses mainly on security standards and risk reduction rather than cultural recovery programs (Nwaeke, 2024). Government oversight of healing lodges restricts Native sovereignty in managing their rehabilitation facilities up to the point that current policies question their ability to maintain autonomy (Clifford, 2019).

The existent literature lacks quantitative evidence which demonstrates how successful Indigenous healing lodges have proven to be over time compared to government-run Correctional Service Canada facilities. Studies demonstrate that healing lodges operated by Indigenous communities yield superior short-term rehabilitation results, yet there is insufficient evidence from large-scale empirical research about the lasting success metrics for their participants beyond a decade (Wise et al., 2024).

Researchers disagree about how much power healing lodges should maintain over Indigenous offenders while running their facilities in comparison to the requirement of federal oversight (Legault & Bleau, 2025). The question remains ambiguous if healing lodges would

benefit by granting full autonomy to healing lodges for cultural protection matters or if better federal monitoring would ensure funding stability (Tetrault, 2023). The research requires additional study for alternative management structures of healing lodges, which would unite Indigenous self-governance with adequate government backing.

### **Methodology**

The research employs secondary research methods combining an extensive literature review to study the effectiveness of healing lodges as an alternative rehabilitative model for Indigenous offenders within Canada. The study evaluates the successes and challenges of healing lodges through a combination of peer-reviewed research, Indigenous justice initiatives and correctional policy documents. The research follows strict guidelines for literature examination to provide an amalgamation of academic and policy-based findings. The study presents itself from a pragmatic perspective that combines Indigenous cultural understanding with practical justice solutions.

The research method uses several essential components, which include conducting literature searches, selecting data parameters, performing thematic data analysis and recognizing specific worldviews. The research methodology includes components that establish systematic procedures as well as evidence-based analysis and compatibility with an examination of healing lodges as a correctional alternative.

### **Literature Search and Data Collection**

The research adopted comprehensive literature investigation through different academic databases and Indigenous-related research projects to explore statistical reports and empirical studies about healing lodges. The research methodology focused on discovering the appropriate resources to create a balanced view of Indigenous rehabilitation and recidivism patterns. A wide

database was explored by incorporating Google Scholar, JSTOR, PRISM Repository, Taylor and Francis Online, Sage Publications, JIBC Online Library, and the University of Calgary Library as research sources. This research utilized these platforms since these databases contain criminological research and Indigenous justice studies along with policy-focused publications.

The research proceeded with Boolean search operators to optimize search results by implementing a focused research methodology. An extensive search using the following keywords and phrases explored the literature base: “Healing Lodges AND Recidivism,” “Indigenous Justice AND Rehabilitation,” “Cultural Healing AND Correctional Facilities,” “Federal Correctional Institutions AND Indigenous Offenders,” and “Decolonization AND Indigenous Corrections.” The specific combination of keywords in the search helped maintain focus on Indigenous correctional models while excluding general criminal justice trends. The search process produced more than 15,000 results before a structured filtering system aimed at relevance combined with methodological soundness and empirical validity.

All included studies were filtered as peer-reviewed, rendering the sources methodologically robust and contextually relevant to answer the research question. After an initial search and requisite filters, a final selection of 22 relevant sources was included from Google Scholar and other databases. The research sources endured thematic classification that enabled an analysis of distinct viewpoints pertaining to healing lodges and Indigenous rehabilitation supplemented with their associated policy issues.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

This research employed inclusion criteria for exclusive rigorous, up-to-date sources directly aligned with the research question. The review included research from 2019 to 2025 since this timeframe demonstrates how recent policy transformations, Indigenous rehabilitation

practices, and societal adaptations affect the efficacy of healing lodges. This study references older research sources to complement the main direction when those studies provide crucial historical background of Indigenous Peoples warranting the inclusion of healing lodges' journey through Canada's justice framework.

The analysis of healing lodges was realized in the sources regarding their impact on decreasing recidivism rates and their rehabilitative effectiveness in promoting Indigenous cultural reintegration. Studies that used statistical data to determine changes in recidivism rates while assessing Indigenous healing models' effectiveness and analyzing barriers to healing lodge expansion acquisition were selected. The research comparing healing lodges with traditional correctional institutions was seen as fundamental because it showed the distinctive approach of Indigenous rehabilitation compared to standard penal approaches in Canada.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

The research excluded studies which were outdated, non-empirical or unrelated to healing lodges as part of their focus and clarity. The review excluded studies from before 2019 unless they contained essential historical background which helped to understand the overrepresentation and recidivism in Indigenous people. The research excluded journals or articles that focused on all-inclusive prison reforms along with studies about non-Indigenous offender rehabilitation programs since these did not directly support the assessment of healing lodges as a distinct Indigenous rehabilitative model.

Only articles that applied quantitative research methods combined with measured data were selected for inclusion, while other forms of media were excluded. The research approach analyzed practical applications of healing lodges inside Canada's corrections facilities by including sources with policy evaluations or rehabilitation analyses for Indigenous People.



**Worldview and Research Perspective**

The research adopts an Indigenous-centered pragmatic framework which focuses on practical solutions that will inculcate culturally appropriate rehabilitation models to the justice system. The pragmatic approach maintains a priority on delivering policy implications accompanied by evidence-based recommendations instead of vague criticism of the justice system. This research develops initial recommendations to enhance the rehabilitation of Indigenous offenders although theories about decolonization and restorative justice supply essential background information (Asadullah et al., 2020).

The justice philosophy behind healing lodges stems from a different model than traditional penal institutions since it focuses on three key elements: community healing through culture-based programs and land restoration as well as Elder wisdom mentoring (Wise et al., 2024). Healing lodges function as an active community-based answer which helps decrease the risk of relapse while rebuilding native identity with genuine post-incarceration integration. This research demonstrates healing lodges stand essential for modern justice operations because Canada should extend their funding support and full system integration to mitigate recidivism amongst Indigenous People.

**Ethical Issues and Researcher Positionality**

The study requires careful analysis of ethics connected to the investigation of Indigenous justice matters without an Indigenous background. The research recognizes that Indigenous justice systems, compiled with cultural rehabilitation models, derive from ancestral knowledge and Indigenous community experiences, which only Indigenous people fully comprehend. The positionality gap which comes from being a non-Indigenous researcher creates barriers to understanding fundamental aspects of Indigenous justice components, healing practices, and

correctional systems. Possible ethical challenges emerge from these situations due to the chance of biased interpretation as well as inaccurate cultural depiction and the need to depend on secondary sources more than directly hearing Indigenous perspectives.

The research has implemented steps to perform this investigation with ethical respect toward the communities involved. An Indigenous-centered justice approach guides this study to analyze healing lodges as Indigenous justice models linked to their traditions.

### **Results**

The research delivers essential findings through analysis of their connection to the main research inquiry regarding effective healing lodge integration into Canada's correctional system for reducing Indigenous re-offenders. The research results cover an evaluation of healing lodges' operations and their success at lowering recidivism along with system obstacles and restrictions that influence data choices. The study validates the role of healing lodges as culturally appropriate and effective correctional models. However, regulatory limitations, funding inadequacy and self-governance constraints restrain its complete potential for rehabilitation.

The growth of healing lodges serves dual purposes because it enhances correctional success and facilitates the effort to decolonize the justice system and restore Indigenous traditions. The justice system requires systemic policy changes supplemented with long-term funding support to achieve full Indigenous control over their justice frameworks. Further, the research must focus on the exploration of extended criminal justice outcomes, creating gender-specific programs and building more healing lodges to serve as preventive justice mechanisms.

### **Indigenous Overrepresentation and Alternative Rehabilitation Models**

The excessive number of Indigenous people in Canada's prisons stands today as the most urgent concern in the criminal justice system. The percentage of Indigenous people living in

Canada constitutes a mere 4%, while they conform to 27% of the total federal imprisonment statistics and show rising incarceration rates despite policy reforms targeting over-incarceration (Hamilton, 2019). The proportion of Indigenous women prisoners has reached half of the total female occupants in federal penitentiaries (Clifford, 2019). According to Cunneen and Tauri (2019), disproportionate representation exists because of prior colonialism, institutional prejudice and insufficient treatment facilities which respond to Indigenous traditions.

Correctional facilities mainly use punitive methods instead of rehabilitation programs to address Indigenous criminal behaviour roots such as ongoing trauma, economic challenges and substance abuse issues (Morin et al., 2022). The research confirms Indigenous offenders face two times the risk of arrests while judges sentence them to punishments three times more severe than non-Indigenous offenders, thus producing higher incarceration durations and extended prison terms (Legault & Bleau, 2025).

Studies show that correctional institutions fail to deliver appropriate services for Indigenous offenders so there should be a transition toward Indigenous-specific healing programs represented by healing lodges. Healing lodges contain potential but do not receive enough recognition because eligibility restrictions, insufficient funding and improved access limitations inhibit their expansion and appropriate implementation (Nwaeke, 2024). The current barriers To provide Indigenous offenders with successful rehabilitation and lower their risk of repeated offences, it is essential to overcome the barriers and introduce a revolution to the federal correctional system.

### **Healing Lodges and Their Impact on Recidivism Reduction**

Various research shows healing lodges decrease repetition of crime rates among Indigenous offenders better than standard correctional facilities. Multiple studies have proven

that healing lodges successfully lower Indigenous offender recidivism compared to mere correctional centers. The research shows Indigenous offenders who exit healing lodges in addition to federal corrections or solely healing lodges demonstrate a lower recidivism rate but those leaving only through federal correctional institutions often offend again at a higher rate (Hamilton, 2019). Healing lodges produce successful results through their dedication to Indigenous cultural identity along with healing practices and community reintegration, which creates both belonging and accountability for offenders who lack such experiences in traditional facilities (Cameron et al., 2021).

The healing lodge approach includes Indigenous traditional practices that use Elder guidance employed with natural therapy and sacred ceremonies to assist convicts with trauma healing and behavioural self-management (Wise et al., 2024). Research shows that healing lodge inmates complete rehabilitation programs at a higher rate since they find cultural relevance indispensable for rehabilitation success (Tetrault, 2023). Although healing lodges prove effective at lowering offender re-arrests, they encounter systemic obstacles that affect their operation. The existing healing lodge system is mostly available for Indigenous inmates because minimum-security prisoners represent the only group who qualify for the program (Montford & Hannah-Moffat, 2020). A vast number of Indigenous offenders fail to access healing lodge programs because systems limit participation to minimum-security inmates thereby diminishing healing lodge programs' broader impact in lowering recidivism rates.

### **Institutional Challenges in Healing Lodge Integration**

The complete adoption of healing lodges in lieu of correctional facilities encounters barriers from governmental funding scarcity while additionally facing geographical constraints and operational limitations set by authority (Clifford, 2019). Healing lodges face the substantial

challenge of persistent funding shortages as one of their most severe problems. The expense of housing prisoners at healing lodges generates better efficiency than traditional federal prisons, although healing lodges only secure a meagre amount of federal prison funding per inmate (Hamilton, 2019). Insufficient funding prevents healing lodges from increasing their capacity to serve Indigenous offenders because it hinders staffing and prevents programming and facility growth (Clifford, 2019).

Systemic colonial influences persist as a main factor in prison systems because intergenerational trauma along with economic hardship and inadequate correctional programs result in increased incarceration rates (Panofsky, Buchanan, John and Goodwill, 2021). The presence of government oversight, along with control measures, restricts healing lodges from accomplishing their intended functions. The jurisdictional authority over many healing lodges rests with Correctional Service Canada as opposed to Indigenous community leadership (Nwaeke, 2024). The evidence shows that Indigenous-led healing lodges deliver more successful rehabilitation results, yet CSC-operated facilities must follow national security rules and correctional standards that impair Indigenous justice principles (Tetrault, 2023). The health of Indigenous Peoples has been observed to improve in cases where Indigenous cultural spaces are established with an intent to facilitate traditional healing and land-based healing methods (Ambtman-Smith & Richmond, 2020). Many healing lodges face reduced effectiveness in their rehabilitative approaches due to their limited authority for self-governance, which prevents the implementation of culturally appropriate rehabilitation models.

Healing lodges face obstacles due to their location in remote geographic areas. Several healing lodges exist in distant settings, which creates access problems for Indigenous offenders, especially those who come from cities that offer more assistance networks (Legault & Bleau,

2025). Lack of funding, restrictive rules and operational constraints prevent healing lodges from becoming an effective replacement for standard correctional institutions at a mass scale.

### **The Need for a Cultural Shift in Rehabilitation Approaches**

The main finding from this study shows Canada's correctional system requires immediate changes in its Indigenous rehabilitation protocols. Current correctional facilities focus heavily on prison punishments along with security surveillance to ensure confinement since these measures fail to get to the core of criminal behaviour and make reoffending worse. Indigenous People have higher rates of recidivism leading to overrepresentation since they face enduring histories of social segregation, intergenerational trauma, and systemic discrimination, as articulated by Hamilton (2019). Research shows that incarceration at federal correctional institutions separates Indigenous offenders from their cultural heritage until they return to society, thus heightening their chances of reoffending (Cunneen & Tauri, 2019).

The rehabilitative approach of healing lodges bases itself on three fundamental elements, including Indigenous traditions, spirituality, and holistic healing. The research proves that Indigenous offenders who access healing lodges demonstrate significantly better behaviour after release when compared to inmates serving time in regular prisons. Healing lodges function successfully by guiding offenders in cultural reconnection while addressing trauma using spiritual techniques along with community healing practices and delivering re-establishment services (Morin et al., 2022). The set of principles in healing lodges aligns with restorative justice models because they prioritize rehabilitation along with reconciliation while working toward societal reintegration instead of standard punitive imprisonment (Tetrault, 2023). Healing lodges stand to become a standard rehabilitative solution for Indigenous inmates only after

Canada implements a basic change toward restorative justice practices suitable for Indigenous nations.

### **Healing Lodges as a Decolonization Strategy**

The healing lodges exceed their role as correctional alternatives because they function as a way for Indigenous people to regain authority over their justice system. This study reveals how healing lodges act as an opposition to traditional Western rehabilitation approaches by giving authority to native legal systems for healing inmates (Hamilton 2019). Through their activities, healing lodges focus on two essential goals: first, they serve to decrease rates of criminal reoffending, and second, they build the fundamental framework for Indigenous self-directed justice processes (Wise et al., 2024).

Healing lodges maintain a marginalized position within the current operation of the justice system despite their demonstrated promising impact. The effectiveness of healing lodges could be questioned when they exist under federal policy administration instead of receiving complete Indigenous community leadership. According to Cameron et al. (2021), Indigenous justice needs complete autonomy for its stated mission to succeed, along with healing lodges serving as critical elements of Indigenous justice with self-governance discussions.

Policy changes for Indigenous justice control remain inconsistent, although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have advocated for increased Indigenous governance of justice processes (Legault & Bleau, 2025). The Canadian government must make healing lodges expansion along with Indigenous leadership control over these facilities their main priority to pursue reconciliation and justice reform (Morin et al., 2022).

### **Barriers Preventing the Expansion of Healing Lodges**

The successful ability of healing lodges in decreasing recidivism is limited by policy restrictions due to unequal funding and limited facilities. The most immediate challenge lies in the fact that healing lodge admission is restricted to minimum-security Indigenous inmates. The current policy restricts medium- and high-security inmates from joining culture-sensitive rehabilitation programs, although the research shows these programs would benefit those with extensive trauma and criminal history (Montford & Hannah-Moffat, 2020). Systemic inequities in rehabilitation options remain adamant because the justice system refuses to provide healing lodges to all Indigenous offenders who need this form of treatment (Hamilton, 2019).

Further, the healing lodges have been proven to be an expensive method for rehabilitation although it has been effective in mitigating the recidivism rates in Indigenous People (Hermle, 2024). Insufficient funding prevents healing lodges from developing programs properly and constructing better infrastructure facilities. Insufficient financial support leads to irregular programming and reduced staffing, which lowers the total performance of healing lodges (Morin et al., 2022).

Healing lodges exist under a dual management system because different facilities maintain Indigenous ownership and supervision from the Correctional Service Canada (CSC). The study demonstrates Indigenous healing lodges deliver better rehabilitation and reintegration services than lodges controlled by CSC. However, federal policies restrict Indigenous self-governance power, and it has been advocated that healing lodges must be operated under Indigenous control to yield rehabilitation (Kent, 2023; Nwaeke, 2024). The ability to fully execute culturally appropriate rehabilitation models at healing lodges remains restricted because Indigenous communities do not have enough authority over these facilities (Tetrault, 2023).

## **Discussion**



The research results indicate healing lodges act both as a culturally sensitive rehabilitation program which lowers recidivism rates among Indigenous offenders. These facilities show limited effectiveness because of governmental policies which constrict their development while funding is minimal and self-governance by Indigenous communities is nonexistent.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research**

The research evaluates healing lodges through statistical analysis and case studies, which form the basis for evaluating policy to deliver precise information about Indigenous offender rehabilitation. This research has made effective use of quantitative data, including recidivism rates, to show how healing lodges work because of their effectiveness. The research taps into criminology and combines Indigenous studies with correctional policies with other disciplines, so its approach represents a multifaceted data approach (Wise et al., 2024). This research supports expanding dialogues about applying Indigenous perspectives instead of Western punishments which previously excluded Indigenous populations from the justice system (Tetrault, 2023).

There are a number of weaknesses in this research, which deserves attention most notably centering on the fact that the researcher holds a non-Indigenous identity. The research study conducted by this non-Indigenous researcher lacks personal understanding of Indigenous justice principles and cultural customs plus the wider effects of institutionalized incarceration on First Nations populations. A critical weakness of this study derives from its total dependence on secondary research sources. The availability of funds and time did not allow for original studies of Indigenous offenders nor interviews with Indigenous elders or healing lodge administrators.

The research primarily uses existing literature, which prevents direct access to firsthand experiences of healing lodge personnel, thus reducing the comprehensive understanding of operational dynamics and obstacles. The existing literature contains insufficient research about healing lodges which compares the organizational structure of various Indigenous communities who operate these facilities. The complete impact of healing lodges could be observed by following Indigenous offenders from imprisonment to post-release through longitudinal research.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The research faces a crucial limitation since it depends mainly on secondary resources due to time and financial constraints existent in the theoretical framework of the course. A four-month deadline and lack of extensive training inhibited the researcher from conducting primary qualitative interviews and focus group practices with Indigenous participants. The research could not verify results with the Indigenous counterparts in healing lodges because it could not establish direct communication with people belonging to the communities which could have been vital for the efficacy of the research. The secondary resources allow a strong comprehension of existing literature, yet they fail to explore the real-life circumstances and cultural elements that authentic data collection through primary methods would corroborate.

Working on dedicated Indigenous research requires non-Indigenous researchers to show sensitivity toward Indigenous cultures and satisfy ethical guidelines when studying this field. The research consistently ensured to conduct this research with dignity and scholarly integrity, yet subconscious biases and cultural misunderstandings might exist. These theoretical weaknesses were reduced during analysis with multiple peer-reviewed scholarly papers alongside priority selection of Indigenous conceptual frameworks as well as the exclusion of exploitative research approaches and misrepresentative findings.

### **Future Research and the Need for Longitudinal Studies**

The research investigates the effectiveness of healing lodges effectively yet highlights multiple areas which warrant additional research. Following the completion of healing lodge programs, there is an insufficient quantity of long-term data available to monitor the reintegration of Indigenous offenders (Faruqui et al., 2024). Studies focus mainly on tracking recidivism rates for a few years after release, but there is insufficient research on how well positive rehabilitation outcomes persist across several decades (Cameron et al., 2021). The assessment of the healing lodge program requires extended research with ten-year or longer monitoring of participants to understand their sustained rehabilitation outcomes.

The analysis would have achieved a more authentic grounding through an upgraded research methodology which integrated interviews with community members. The quality of research could include both newer reports as well as contributions from different Indigenous communities. The limitations of this study lead to significant discoveries which strengthen existing perspectives on the broader subject matter while respecting ethical research standards.

Future investigation needs to assess what modifications healing lodges require for Indigenous women based on their elevated susceptibility to trauma and victimization rates (Legault & Bleau, 2025). Research should investigate healing lodge programs expanding by offering prevention programs for at-risk Indigenous youth to prevent their re-entry into the criminal justice system (Morin et al., 2022). The paradigm shift from prosecuting to proactively helping Indigenous people advances the requirement for preventing future incarcerations.

### **Recommendations**

The study identifies healing lodges as an effective rehabilitation model for Indigenous offenders, which operates best when systemic barriers, funding limitations and restrictive

policies do not impede their effectiveness. Multiple essential recommendations need to be implemented to enable the healing lodges to reach maximum operation capacity as well as reduce significantly the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in correctional institutions. The expansion in research to understand gaps in knowledge should go hand-in-hand with rendering healing lodges more accessible. The Indigenous communities must receive stronger backing from government initiatives and implement post-release programs to achieve better outcomes to retain rehabilitation success.

Research on Indigenous offenders after healing lodge programs remains insufficient because there are no extensive studies that track their progress over time. Studies about recidivism patterns (2-5 years post-release) are prevalent, yet they do not establish what happens to heal lodge rehabilitation effects when measured beyond ten years. Longitudinal studies need to evaluate healing lodges by measuring extended recidivism statistics for Indigenous offenders along with their employment patterns and mental health results along with their ability to successfully rejoin their communities. Future studies must focus on identifying traits of healing lodges, particularly Elder mentorship combined with land-based healing along with spiritual ceremonies, to fully understand their rehabilitation mechanisms.

Female Indigenous offenders make up half of all federally incarcerated women, but healing lodges exist for only a scarce number of these female inmates. Research on male Indigenous offenders dominates existing literature. Hence, it fails to supply essential insights regarding Indigenous women's rehabilitation needs, their high experiences of trauma, domestic violence and intergenerational poverty. The research about expanding healing lodges into preventive justice initiatives instead of correctional programs is extremely scarce. Healing lodges

currently work with incarcerated Indigenous people, yet their holistic principles may assist vulnerable youth to prevent their exposure to criminal justice.

Further, the community members face substantial difficulties with reintegration when healing lodges end their rehabilitative services because ongoing support systems for offenders remain inadequate. The challenges Indigenous offenders encounter regarding stable housing in addition to accessing mental health and addiction services, make them vulnerable to returning to crime after completing healing lodge programs. The gap in cultural support for Indigenous offenders between healing lodge completion and reentry into society warrants greater development of cultural transition programs. The support system after release should provide Indigenous-specific training for employment, Indigenous-led solutions and robust networks with spiritual and psychological assistance regulated by Elders.

Further, the management structure of healing lodges is divided between Indigenous-owned facilities and Correctional Service Canada-operated ones, which are required to follow federal correctional standards that contrast with traditional justice values. Healing lodges have been established to mitigate recidivism amongst Indigenous people and have been more effective than federal prisons in Canada. The research demonstrates that healing centers managed by Indigenous leadership achieve greater success outcomes than centers controlled by CSC, yet bureaucratic regulations prevent them from delivering native-driven rehabilitation programs with full autonomy.

### **Conclusion**

The research findings show healing lodges create a suitable rehabilitative environment that helps Indigenous offenders by responding to their cultural needs in Canada. Healing lodges provide better results than traditional prisons since they focus on spiritual practices and cultural

identity, which ultimately leads to reduced criminal offender relapse. The recidivism rates of offenders who undergo healing lodge programs stay lower than those who spend their time in standard correctional institutions. Healing lodges have aimed to establish Indigenous-led rehabilitation as an essential element in the justice system.

The use of healing lodges remains limited because of narrow participation requirements, financial gaps and insufficient Indigenous control over their operations. The restriction of medium and high-security Indigenous offenders from rehabilitation programs hampers their effectiveness because it blocks the groups that require more robust rehabilitation efforts. Financial shortages create barriers for healing lodges to grow their programs and hire staff while improving facilities because they reduce the capacity to assist more Indigenous offenders.

The research identifies significant research gaps because there is inadequate data about how healing lodges affect long-term offender reintegration. Short-term recidivism rates are the primary focus of research studies when there is an urgent necessity to track offenders for over a decade or after a decade. The long-term success of healing lodges depends on adopting medium-security offenders into the programs and securing steady funding sources in addition to increasing Indigenous governance of healing lodges.

By providing Indigenous reintegration programs following release, the government can optimize healing lodge success as a crime prevention approach. The contribution of healing lodges plays an essential role in Indigenous justice reform progress. Healing lodges achieve dual importance in Canadian society since they support rehabilitation efforts while advancing Indigenous reconciliation through justice programs.

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