The 2022 Intertribal Opioid Wellness Summit: Promoting the Integration of Harm Reduction and Holistic Whole-Person Wellness Efforts

Lily Ward

Valentine Sireech

Suzi Prevedel
suzanne.prevedel@usu.edu

Cris Meier
Utah State University, cris.meier@usu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/oiq

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Outcomes and Impact Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.
The 2022 Intertribal Opioid Wellness Summit: Promoting the Integration of Harm Reduction and Holistic Whole-Person Wellness Efforts

Lily Ward, Valentine Sireech, Suzi Prevedel, Cris Meier

Abstract

Substance Use Disorder, including Opioid Use Disorder, is a persistent problem within tribal and rural communities across Utah. In response, the Tribal and Rural Opioid Initiative Resource Center delivered an annual summit that brought together community members and local service providers impacted by substance misuse to improve awareness and use of harm reduction resources and reduce social stigma. This article describes the results of the 2022 Intertribal Opioid Wellness Summit.

Introduction

While much of the nation is experiencing a drug misuse crisis of street drugs or a mix of street drugs and prescription drugs, Utah’s public health crisis is primarily one of prescription drug misuse (Wiseman, 2019). Rural regions within the state have experienced significant spikes in opioid-related deaths and injuries in comparison to their urban counterparts (DasGupta et al., 2020). Despite evidence suggesting a tailored response to drug misuse in rural areas is ideal, access to effective substance use interventions, as well as other health and wellness resources, remains a barrier. For example, medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), the front-line treatment for OUD, are available in less than half of the substance use treatment facilities in rural Utah communities (SAMHSA, 2017). Additionally, harm reduction services, especially those for people who use psychostimulants, are absent in rural areas across the U.S. (Des Jarlais et. Al., 2013). Limited proximity to addiction treatment facilities, in combination with the social stigma surrounding substance misuse, exacerbates treatment barriers for rural patients and may prolong drug use. The division in substance treatment within rural Utah misses an opportunity to negate the harmful effects of substance misuse on these communities.

Response and Participants

The Tribal and Rural Opioid Initiative (TROI) was launched in 2018 in response to elevated drug use in rural Utah. In partnership with Utah State University (USU) Extension, the TROI team includes harm reduction practitioners, tribal health and wellness experts, public health agencies, and community partners. TROI utilizes a community-based participatory approach to address the stigma associated with drug use and provide harm reduction education across Utah. Interventions delivered by TROI include overdose response curricula for youth, adults, and Native American communities, harm reduction training for health professionals, a podcast debunking myths about harm reduction, and the Voices of Resiliency graphic novel series, as well as an annual summit focusing on substance use in rural and tribal communities.

Each year the summit consists of a range of activities to support the sharing of ideas, strategies, and best practices for addressing the opioid epidemic. The latest summit, held in June 2022 in Vernal, Utah, consisted of both pre-conference and conference activities. Pre-conference
activities included breakout sessions for first responders and a health and wellness expo. Conference activities included keynote presentations given by local and national tribal community members, and main sessions given by recovery treatment experts, wellness researchers, peer support specialists, and a social open to the public. All presentations covered a variety of health and wellness subjects relating to prevention, recovery, and treatment.

The 2022 Intertribal Opioid Wellness Summit targeted tribal community members and organizations within the intermountain west. This event successfully brought together community members and Substance Use Disorder service providers to support wellness and recovery. A total of 155 people attended the summit, and over a quarter of the participants represented Native American peoples. There was a range of professionals in attendance at the conference, where the main categories represented pharmacists, addiction professionals, medical professionals (e.g., clinical assistants, dentists), prevention specialists (e.g., suicide prevention, social workers), and peer support specialists (e.g., counselor, peer advocate).

Outcomes and Impact

Following the summit, a post-survey was provided to all attendees. To ensure the greatest participation rates, paper surveys were given to participants in attendance on the last day of the summit. Additionally, an invitation to complete the survey was virtually sent to all registered participants. The outcomes assessed included an increased sense of community, social stigma reduction, awareness of prevention, treatment, and recovery services in Utah, and increased knowledge of harm reduction practices. Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine survey data ($n = 74$).

Evaluation results indicated 94% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the summit increased their sense of belonging within the community. The majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed (90%) that they learned about resources that will assist them in their work. Additionally, attendees most often strongly agreed or agreed (95%) that they learned about resources that can assist their community with substance-related concerns.

When asked questions related to stigma, results showed that overall, almost all respondents strongly agreed or agreed (99%) that participating in the summit helped to reduce stigma about substance use disorders. Results also showed that the summit aided in a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of substance misuse resources. For example, a majority of respondents reported either strongly agreed or agreed (90%) that as a result of participating in the summit, they were more aware of prevention, treatment, and recovery services in their state. Finally, participants were asked about their knowledge of harm reduction. Survey results indicated an increase in understanding of harm reduction. More specifically, 92% either strongly agreed or agreed that they have a better understanding of harm reduction as a result of what they learned during the summit activities.

Public Value and Next Steps

Overall, evaluation results of the 2022 Intertribal Opioid Wellness Summit suggest that participants felt more equipped to assist their community in substance-related concerns, as they
experienced an increase in awareness of available resources as well as a sense of belonging and connectedness to their community. There is also evidence that participating in the summit greatly impacted attendees’ awareness and understanding of the importance of reducing substance-related stigma. Finally, participating in summit activities and learning from key professionals in the field of substance misuse greatly impacted attendees’ knowledge and awareness of what harm reduction is and the importance of integrating it into their practices.

While an increase in collaboration, stigma reduction, program and resource awareness, and knowledge of harm reduction practices was facilitated by the summit, there is more to be done to address opioid misuse in Utah. While we will continue to provide activities through TROI Resource Center, and additional efforts are needed by relevant organizations. We will continue to work towards establishing effective local coalitions to increase evidence-based harm reduction services in tribal and rural communities. By building partnerships and increasing knowledge through rural OUD resources, the outcomes of this summit will persist long after the end of funding.

References

DasGupta, D., Madden, F., Sulzer, S., Light, T., Chapoose, M., & Prevedel, S. (2020). The urban/rural divide in access to medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder in Utah. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_curall/2098

