



# COVID-19

## & Pandemic Resilience

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**CAAN**

**Communities, Alliances & Networks**

### **Knowledge Bundle 3**



Dr. Peter  
Centre



**“Culturally safe social structures strengthen the resilience of Indigenous people.”**

– Dr. Earl Nowgesic, Visioning Director of CAAN  
Communities, Alliances & Networks



Dr. Peter  
Centre

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### CONTENTS

**Utilizing Cultural Land-Based  
Practices in Harm Reduction  
as a Response to COVID-19**

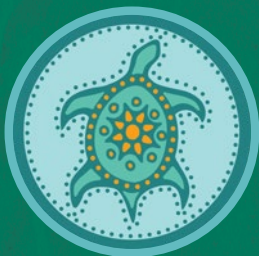
**Resiliency Displayed in Indigenous  
Communities During COVID-19**

**Be Prepared For The Next Pandemic**



# **Utilizing Cultural Land-Based Practices in Harm Reduction**

**As a Response to COVID-19**

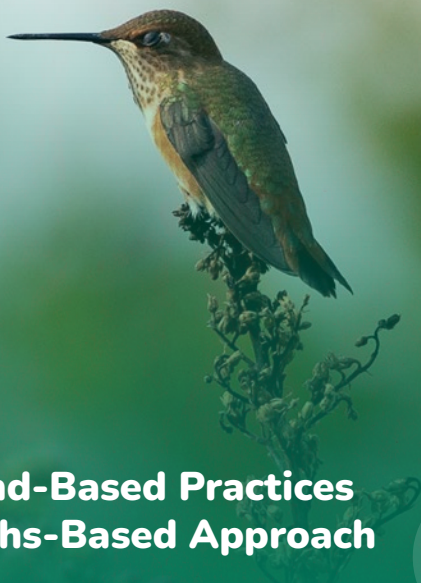






## COVID-19 & Substance Use

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic back in March 2020, Indigenous communities blocked off their regions and abided by social distancing and 14-day quarantine policies. Restrictions to in-person health care services, barriers to harm reduction and treatment services, and social distancing from community members exacerbated both substance use, HIV, and HCV rates. The use of toxic and unregulated drugs increased as a response to social and cultural isolation, putting many at risk. Between April 2020 to December 2020, there were over 5,148 apparent overdoses (an 89% increase). The majority of these cases were linked to fentanyl.



## **Utilizing Land-Based Practices as a Strengths-Based Approach**

Indigenous communities utilized virtual and in-person land-based practices during COVID-19 as a strengths-based approach. Connecting to the land is sacred and provides comfort, safety, transformation, trust, (w)holistic movement, reconnection, and the ability to be present. It protected their community members from the harms related to cultural disruption, and emotional and mental distress in a (w)holistic way.

It was a preventative and accessible method to address the increase in substance use and overdose rates. It continued to foster connections to culture, community members, family members, and identity. These activities were offered by land-based educators, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and their helpers.

## Virtual & In-Person Land-Based Activities

Communities across Canada came together virtually through zoom or social media. These platforms were used as a sense of comfort during the time of the unknown. Below are some examples of virtual land-based activities demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic:

### Talking circles

Drumming

Dancing

Powwows

Language teachings

Displaying regalia

### Bingo

Traditional teachings

Beading

Storytelling

Ribbon skirt making

For in-person activities, some communities sectioned off open school grounds or assisted community members on land in small groups. Each activity abided by social distancing and health guidelines to limit the risk of exposure. Below are some examples of in-person land-based activities demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Gardening

Ceremonies

Language teachings

Traditional  
teachings

Hiking

Gathering  
medicines

Canoeing

Snowshoeing

Hunting

Harvesting



A green hummingbird is perched on a thin, dark branch. The background is a solid green color with decorative elements: a bright orange four-pointed star in the upper left, a large light green circle in the upper right, and several smaller light green circles of varying sizes scattered throughout. The hummingbird is facing left, with its long beak pointed forward. Its feathers are a vibrant green, and its wings are slightly spread.

# Resiliency Displayed in Indigenous Communities During COVID-19

- **Community-Led Shutdowns:**  
Many Indigenous communities decided to issue quarantine lockdowns before it was required.
- **Partnered With Local Police Stations, Hospitals, & Community Organizations:**  
Monitored COVID-19, abided by quarantine policies, and prevented others from entering the region to prevent further exposure.
- **Youth-Led Engagement Activities:**  
Facilitated on social media platforms to connect to family, friends, community members, and Indigenous ways of knowing.



- **Seniors, Elders, & Knowledge Keepers Were Supported:**  
Through daily grocery dropped off, virtual visits, and isolation from those exposed to COVID-19 to protect their health and well-being.
- **Shared Food and Health Supplies:**  
Traditional and market supplies were provided to everyone. These supplies were delivered, produced, and/or harvested from the land.
- **Accessible COVID-19 Testing:**  
Testing sites and door-to-door testing services were provided to those exposed to COVID-19.
- **Harm Reduction:**  
Some communities increased the availability of harm reduction programs and naloxone kits to tackle the increase in substance use and overdose rates. Offered remote and telephone services to increase accessibility.
- **Participated in Traditions:**  
Both virtually (e.g. pow wows, showcasing regalia, morning prayers, storytelling, etc.) and physically (e.g. ceremonies, gardening, dancing, bingo, etc.) while abiding by social distancing.



## Be Prepared for the Next Pandemic

**Do you use substances?** Here are some harm reduction tips to keep you safe and prepared for another possible pandemic.



### Clean Your Hands

Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 15 minutes OR BZK wipes combined with alcohol-based hand sanitizer. This should be done any time you are handling cash, preparing your drugs, or had any contact with someone else.



### Stock up on Naloxone Kits

Have naloxone kits on standby in case of emergencies. Have it on standby in case you or someone you use with experiences an overdose. Let them or a trusted person know where it is.



## **Cover Your Face**

Use a face mask or covering in indoor public spaces, when using substances with someone, and during other face-to-face interactions (ex. family, friends, community members, etc.). Try to maintain a safe distance (6 feet / 2 meters).



## **Connect With Your Health Care Provider**

Connect with your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you are on medication-assisted treatment or opioid agonist therapies. Ask them for extended prescriptions and about their procedures if you are self-isolating.



## **Be Cautious**

Be cautious if you are using a new drug supply from a new dealer or from an unknown source. If possible, test them to make sure they are safe to use.



## **Don't Share Your Gear & Prepare Your Own Drug Supply**

Don't share your gear (ex. pipes, stems, needles, filter, swabs, ties, etc.) or have someone else prepare your drugs to prevent exposure to other germs and viruses.



## **Stock Up On Supplies**

Stock up on harm reduction supplies (ex. syringes, alcohol wipes, filters, spoons, etc.) to limit contact with others, if you have to self-isolate, or in case your local harm reduction service becomes limited on in- person services, supplies, hours, and staff.



## **Stock Up on Drug of Choice**

If possible, stock up on your drug of choice. Just be mindful that carrying larger amounts of drugs, in case you are stopped by police.



## **Prepare for Withdrawals**

Ask your healthcare provider for opioid withdrawal medications, opioid agonist therapy, or take over-the-counter medications (ex. ibuprofen, Pepto-Bismol, Imodium). If you are experiencing alcohol or Benzodiazepine withdrawal, have someone you trust to get you medical care.





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