

Implementation of the La Loche & Clearwater River Dene Nation Managed Alcohol Program in Response to COVID 19 Emergency Closure of the Liquor Outlets: A Case Study/Evaluation Summary

The case study/evaluation of the La Loche/Clearwater River Dene First Nation (CRDN) Emergency Managed Alcohol Program (MAP) lays out experiences and lessons learned from the rapid implementation of the MAP program in response to the closure of the liquor outlets which was part of the local strategy in dealing with a COVID 19 outbreak in the communities. The MAP was intended to prevent the harms of alcohol withdrawal, to assist individuals who were required to self-isolate as either cases or contacts of COVID-19 infections and to increase general social distancing to help reduce the spread of COVID 19. Content in this document was obtained through feedback from clients, Saskatchewan Health Authority staff involved with providing the MAP, CRDN representatives, and Community Safety and Well-being (CSWB), Northern Alcohol Strategy, a branch of Saskatchewan Justice that supports northern communities on locally-led planning to reduce alcohol-related harms.

The quick implementation of the MAP was made possible through collaboration of stakeholders in designing client pathways, providing education and awareness to community members, and in the identification of individuals who were considered alcohol-dependent. The large volume of clients rapidly entering the program presented significant challenges and limited the ability to access detailed health information and do comprehensive, personal assessments. Another challenge that became apparent was addressing the stigma attached to alcohol-dependency and communicating accurate information to community members.

Notable successes were the increase in clients' health perceptions while participating in the MAP, no withdrawals experienced by clients while participating in the MAP, and in the collaboration of stakeholders to deal with challenges and overcome obstacles. Although all the clients identified that they would like to continue in the MAP long-term, when the liquor outlets re-opened after three weeks, almost all clients discontinued their participation in the program within a few weeks, although those required to self-isolate, because of the public health order, continued to be offered MAP for months following the COVID 19 outbreak.

The MAP is a harm reduction option for individuals who are alcohol-dependent. The La Loche/CRDN emergency MAP prevented individuals from experiencing withdrawal when alcohol became unavailable. However, as stakeholders identified, a broader multi-sectoral community-based alcohol management plan and applicable programs that meet people where they are at, all along the alcohol use spectrum, is necessary in the La Loche and CRDN communities.

