



National American Indian and Alaska Native

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

**IOWA**

**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# Trauma Informed Care in Indian Country

September 14, 2022

Special Guest Speaker  
Avis Garcia, PhD, LAT, LPC, NCC,  
Northern Arapaho



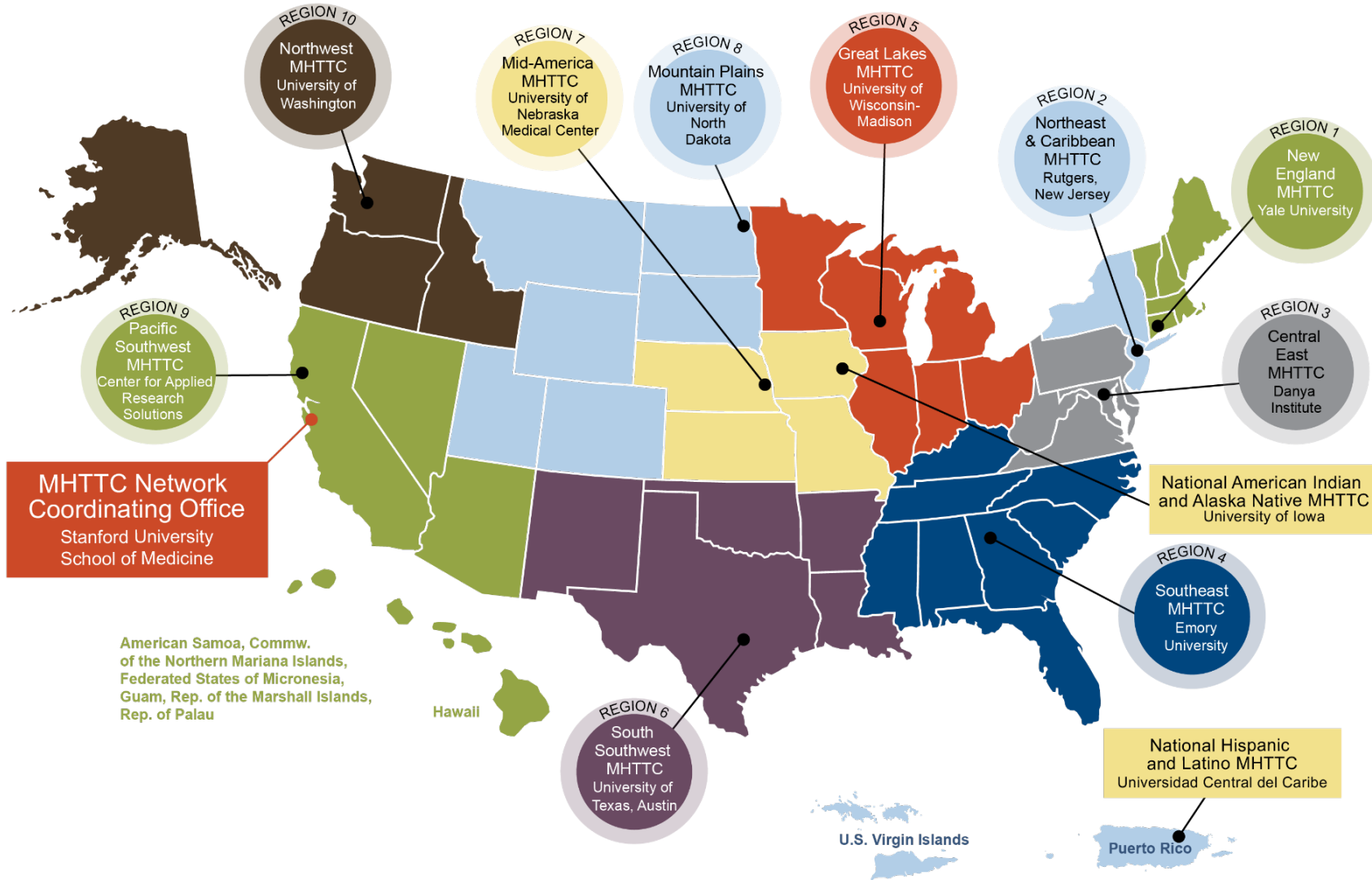
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Mental Health  
Technology  
Transfer Center**



# ***SAMHSA***

Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
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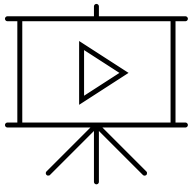
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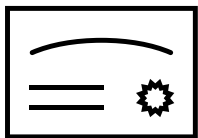


# Follow-up

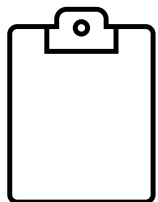
Following today's event, you will receive a follow up email, which will include:



Links to the presentation slides and recording, if applicable



Information about how to request and receive CEUs if applicable



Link to our evaluation survey (GPRA)



# Land Acknowledgement

We would like to take this time to acknowledge the land and pay respect to the Indigenous Nations whose homelands were forcibly taken over and inhabited.

Past and present, we want to honor the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations.

This calls us to commit to forever learn how to be better stewards of these lands through action, advocacy, support, and education.

We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced occupation of Native American territories, and we respect the many diverse indigenous people connected to this land on which we gather from time immemorial.

While injustices are still being committed against Indigenous people on Turtle Island, today we say thank you to those that stand with Indigenous peoples and acknowledge that land reparations must be made to allow healing for our Indigenous peoples and to mother earth, herself.

Dekibaota, Elleh Driscoll, Meskwaki and Winnebago Nations

Ttakimaweakwe, Keely Driscoll, Meskwaki and Winnebago Nations

Ki-o-kuk, Sean A. Bear, 1<sup>st</sup>. Meskwaki



# Today's Speaker:

Avis Garcia, PhD, NCC, LPC, LAT Avis Garcia is an enrolled member of the Northern Arapaho Tribe and is affiliated with the Eastern Shoshone Tribes of the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. Avis is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Addictions Therapist. Avis holds a doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision who specializes in Addictions treatment and work with Native Americans. Avis works with individuals of all ages and does, individual, group, couples and family therapy. She specializes in the treatment of substance use disorders and trauma. Her therapeutic approach is to privilege Indigenous knowledge and draw on the strengths of individuals and families to promoting intergenerational healing, through research and clinical work.





Avis Garcia, PhD  
Trauma Informed Care

September 14, 2022

# **TRAUMA INFORMED CARE IN INDIAN COUNTRY**

Avis Garcia, PhD

# History



- Unlike many other ethnic minorities, Native Americans had resources and means to survive.
- 574 federally recognized tribes with 175 languages.
- European's introduced disease that decreased native populations to 10% of what they were at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



# Culture and Society



- 50% High School graduates
- 3x poverty rate of rest of population
- 50% NA's on or near reservation are unemployed
- Median family income is \$40,360
- 31% live below poverty
- Many drop out of high school and do not finish college
- Households headed by females

# Social Determinants

More likely to be poor

Unemployed

Have a lower level of educational attainment

High homicide and suicide rates

Use of alcohol and other drugs contributes to the high rates of death from chronic liver disease.

# Alcohol & Drugs



- Cirrhosis is the 6<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death
- 62% of violent offenses involve alcohol, compared to 42% of other races.
- Violent crimes experienced by NA's 48% involved alcohol, 9% drugs, 14% both.

Alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities are higher 68.1%

Attitudes toward drinking vary, those on reservation more likely to binge drink

NA's 6x more likely to die of alcohol related causes

# Suicide

- NA's are 2x more likely to attempt and complete suicide than the general population
- Low self-esteem, cultural identity conflicts, lack of positive role models, abuse history, social pressures to use substances, hopelessness and breakdown in the family are contributors to substance use that lead to increased suicidality and engagement in risky behaviors.

# Health Disparities in Wyoming

<b>Life Expectancy – Average Age of Death</b>	<b>Years</b>
<b>General Population</b>	<b>78.7</b>
<b>Native Americans in United States</b>	<b>71.1</b>
<b>Native Americans in Wyoming</b>	<b>53.1</b>

# Wyo Vital Stats



<b>Mortality Rates/100,000 Population</b>	<b>Native Americans</b>	<b>Non-Natives</b>
<b>Cancer</b>	185.70	173.10
<b>Heart Disease</b>	170.28	164.07
<b>Accidents and Adverse Effects</b>	121.01	61.75
<b>Diabetes</b>	90.01	23.20
<b>Chronic Liver Disease</b>	87.00	9.85
<b>Infant Mortality/100</b>	14.00	6.00

Causes of Deaths for Wyoming's Tribal Population 2001-10/11

# Epigenetics



- How Biology Contributes to Cycles of Trauma
- How can one live with pain that you didn't personally experience?
- Evidence at the cellular level that powerful stressful environmental conditions can leave an imprint or "mark" on the epigenome (cellular genetic material) that can be carried into future generations with devastating consequences.
- Babies can be born with a predisposition to PTSD, and addictive behaviors due to environmental factors

# DNA articles



- Scientists have found that memories may be passed down through generations in our DNA. (Taken from *The Mind Unleashed*)
- Childhood trauma leaves a mark on DNA of some victims: Gene-environment interaction causes lifelong dysregulation of stress hormones. Max-Planck-Gesellschaft.



## History cont...

- Historical evidence in and out of the Rocky Mountains of Colorado
- Followed the buffalo
- Gold rusk in 1860's, disrupted life and pushed north, camped at Medicine Bow
- Several trails in Laramie mountains
- Beautiful Estes park region for generations
- Nov. 30, 1864 – Sand Creek Massacre under Col. John Chivington. Chief Black Kettle and Little Antelope.



**Damn any man who sympathizes with the  
Indians. I have come to kill Indians and believe it  
is right and honorable to use any means under  
God's Heaven to kill them.**

**Colonel John Milton Chivington  
U.S. Army**

# Forced Acculturation



- 1878 military escort to Wind River Rez
- Shoshone there first, on-going strife. Traditional enemy of the Arapaho.
- Boarding School: 1900's denied practice of cultural and spiritual ways, families ripped apart, children taken, many children died.

# Boarding Schools



“Kill the Indian, save the man” was the motto of Richard Henry Pratt, the most prominent Indian educator of the late 1800s.

Progressive reformers like Pratt believed it was essential to get Indian children away from their families and nations in order to prevent parents from raising the children in their own cultures. So the reformers founded boarding schools where children could be isolated from Indian languages, values, and traditions. Cultural erasure was the stated goal.



## Historical Trauma (HT)

- Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart defines *historical trauma* as “*the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over one’s lifetime and from generation to generation following loss of lives, land and vital aspects of culture.*” (2003, p.7)
- The poverty, violence, poor health, suicide, unemployment, addiction, and hopelessness in many Native communities are clear symptoms of unresolved grief and pain due to genocide.

# CARLISLE INDIAN SCHOOL 1890



Avis Garcia, PhD

# Carlisle



A REPRESENTATIVE FIRST PARTY.

Avis Garcia, PhD

# FORCED ASSIMILATION



©Avis Garcia, PhD



# Addiction & Trauma



- Experience of trauma increases likelihood of turning to substances to cope.
- Self-medication
- Escape painful emotions and therefore control them
- Regulate and relieve intense feelings
- Suppress painful memories
- Find relief
- Gain sense of control

# Substance use

- Reenactment of trauma
- Expression of self-blame, self-hate
- Self-soothe
- Maintain sense of self if feeling threatened with loss of identity
- Escape perceived rejection - substance is loyal friend
- Express ownership – “It’s my body”
- To connect with others



# Substances Functions

- Initial impulse to self-medicate appears to help
- Stability – expectations from substances can appear reliable compared to human relationships
- Alcohol- lowers agitation, initially sedates a spiking cortisol reaction from traumatic event, sleep disturbances, nightmares, and other intrusive symptoms.
- Opioids – calm feelings of rage and aggression
- Cocaine/Methamphetamine – anti-depressant impact

# REAL IMPACTS



- Compounds original symptoms
- Exacerbate discomfort
- Increases alienation from others and self
- Promotes greater dysfunction
- Keeps survivor from finding healthy ways to cope
- Prevents from getting needs met
- Takes away control – leads to loss of control in life
- Prevents healing



# Learned Helplessness

1. Cognitive – inability to learn new responses to overcome prior learning that trauma is uncontrollable
  2. Emotional – the helpless state resembles depression.
  3. Motivational – reduced motivation to try new coping responses.
- The individual therefore **STOPS LEARNING** new ways of responding

# Learned Helplessness



- The individual **CANNOT** process their own way back to normal response patterns.
- The longer an individual is in an uncontrollable situation, the greater the number of times they will have practices inappropriate responses.
- Days...Months...Years...Decades...Generations...of building highly practiced inappropriate response. Such as ...Drinking, drugs, violence, breaking the law, other addictions (Process addictions)



# How to help Native Americans

- Culturally Based Care (CBC) or Culturally Based Treatment (CBT): Traditional practices of Western models of care adapted for NA's.
- Involve community, family and emphasizing relationships and respect, and open-door policy as foundation for culturally relevant interventions.
- Difference in communication patterns. Including ability to tolerate silence and listen to honor communication norms of NAs as with storytelling.
- Understand humor and be patient.

# Treatment/Prevention



## **Native American/AA**

- Uncritical attitude
- Cooperation
- Sharing
- Humble presentation
- Happiness
- Honor Elders
- Silence
- Tribal values
- Cultural healing
- Unity with nature

## **Traditional AA**

- Critical attitude
- Competition
- Ownership
- Outgoing/self-righteous
- Success
- Honor self
- Verbalism/outspoken
- Individualism
- Synthetic drugs
- Separateness with nature





# Healing Journey

- Joseph Gone (2009) Community-Based Treatment for Native Americans Historical Trauma: Prospects for Evidence-based Practice.
- 4 themes emerged from the data:
  1. Emotional Burdens “ Carrying the Pain”
  2. Cathartic Disclosure- Confess & purge influence
  3. Self-As-Project Reflexivity- Lifelong process
  4. Impact of Colonization: Reclamation of Indigenous Heritage, Identity, and Spirituality

# Healing Journey



Three links central to the healing process

- Culture – Relearn traditional practices, Language
- History- Reconceptualization of life experience in context of European Colonization.
- Identity – more robust post-colonial Indigenous identity by reclaiming cultural and spiritual practices.

# Native Hope



- Coming to Terms with the Past and our People's History
- One's own story and own past.
- Not our fault.
- Begin to truly heal and step into greater freedom, greater hope, greater responsibility to live differently than before.

# Hope & Courage



Through fully embracing our stories and our pasts, we can choose to end cycles of grief and trauma in order to offer a better life for the next generation. We can let go of bad patterns, let the cycles of abuse and addiction die.

- There are strong Native men and women finding healing.
- We believe stories have healing power (science backs this up) Narrative therapy.
- Sharing stories of hope and healing.



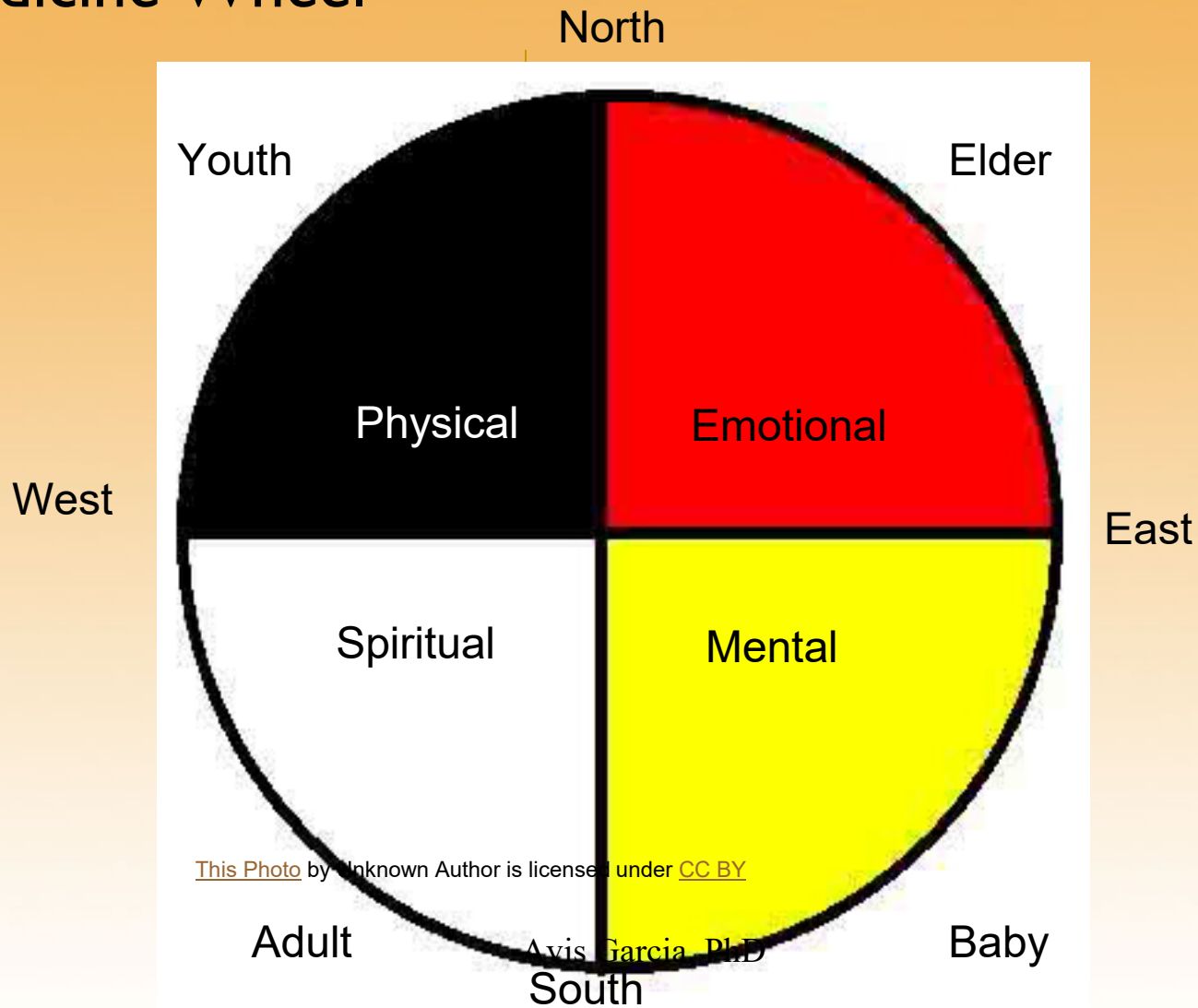
# Cultural Constructs

- Include family
- Respect
- Spirituality
- Traditionalism

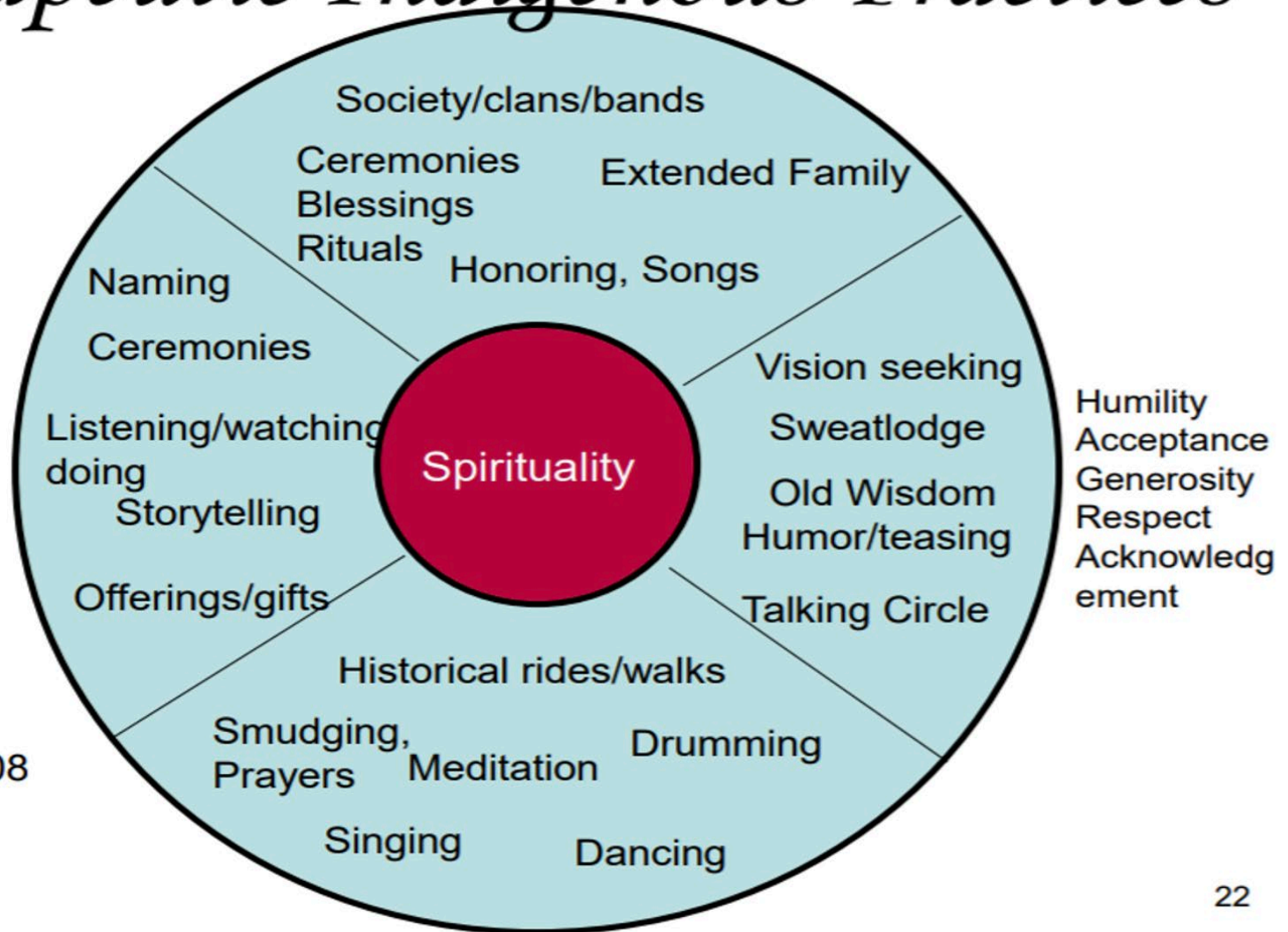
Integrated into treatment & prevention in order to gain acceptance from NA help seekers.

# Wellness

- Medicine Wheel



# Therapeutic Indigenous Practices



# Sweat Lodge



This is where we heal our pain



Avis Garcia, PhD





# Treatment/Prevention Continued

- NA cultures contain all the necessary knowledge to socialize mentally, healthy, substance-free youth. This knowledge need not be replaced with information or socialization derived from European culture.
- Cultural ways and knowledge must be viewed as equal to social science prevention and TX knowledge.
- There exist within NA cultures developmental risk and protective factors.
- Treatment must be culturally specific to be successful.



# Cultural Considerations

- Sharing stories as way of education
- Keep session informal in nature and conduct in a comfortable setting, as well as allowing for flexible start and end time.
- I learned from personal experience NAs populations prefer to work without time pressures or constraints. “Indian Time”

# Storytelling





Let us put our minds  
together and see what life  
we can make for our  
children.

•~~~Sitting Bull

# Questions?



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Avis Garcia, PhD