Among Aboriginal people, spirituality is the first and most important aspect of healing. Of the many Native ceremonies that have a spiritual component, few are as powerful in their impact on restoring a balance of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well-being as the sweat lodge. Within the last two decades, recognition of the importance of traditional healing practices for Aboriginal people has created an upsurge of interest in traditional healing practices, including the sweat lodge ceremony. Increasingly sweat lodges are incorporated into healing programs that serve Aboriginal people, and are made available to non-Indigenous people as well. Their appeal across cultural and religious traditions stems from a non-doctrinal view of spirituality. Despite that fact traditional healing practices have always been valued by Aboriginal peoples there is a lack of research on their efficacy. A preliminary study of effect of the sweat lodge ceremony on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being suggests that there are measurable changes to spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. The results suggest that the sweat lodge may be an effective way to help participants to increase their sense of spirituality.

The morning session, an overview of Aboriginal Spirituality, will be followed by lunch and travel to a sweat lodge ceremony. Participation in the Sweat Lodge Ceremony will be limited though observers are welcome.
Although Indigenous people have always acknowledged the healing benefits of the sweat lodge, and despite the fact that it has historically been an important part of Aboriginal ceremonies throughout North America, little effort has been made to examine its impact on participants. Native people recognize this ceremony as a powerful way to experience healing spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. Recently more non-Aboriginal people have been welcome to participate as the legacy of colonial suppression which banned it, along with many other spiritual practices, has lifted. Coupled with an increased interest in natural and Indigenous healing practices, and a revival of traditional Indigenous ceremonies, the sweat lodge has been increasingly used as a means of healing in multiple dimensions of body, mind, emotion, and spirit, in treatment programs that serve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Aaland, 1978; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996; Smith, 2005; Walkingstick-Garett & Osborne, 1995). This implementation in prisons and substance abuse treatment centers attests to its recognition and growing acceptance as an important aspect of healing for persons of Indigenous descent ((Brady, 1995; Jackson, 2000). Despite this growing acceptance, no empirical studies attest to the efficacy of the sweat lodge ceremony. We conducted a preliminary study to determine if we could detect any differences in emotional, mental or spiritual well-being on a relatively heterogeneous group of both Aboriginal and Caucasian sweat lodge participants using a simple pre-post experimental design.

The use of water and heat to promote sweating for purposes of cleansing exists in many cultures on all (inhabited) continents and can be traced back to pre-biblical times. The ancient Greeks and Romans used hot baths and sweating techniques to draw out bad humours and as a general form of relaxation and social gathering. Likewise, for millennia
Finnish saunas have been used to promote cleanliness, healing, and renewed strength. In Russia a bania, steam and hot air continues to create a humid, cleansing environment for participants while Turkish hammans and Japanese hot tubs are widely and similarly used in their respective countries (Aaland, 1978). Sweating cleanses the body of toxic elements and boosts the immune system (Smoley, 1992). In these various manifestations of cleansing processes heat and water are universal. However, few cultures have incorporated them into a carefully prescribed ceremony which emphasizes, in addition to the physical healing and cleansing that are universally acknowledged, the spiritual element. Indigenous North Americans are among those people for whom the sweating experience is a traditional ceremony that prioritizes the spiritual element as it aims to purify, cleanse, and heal the body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

The terms First Nations, Aboriginal, and Indigenous are used interchangeably to denote Canadian people of Indigenous descent.
Within the Indigenous world, health consists of a balance of physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental components and a lack of balance results in illness in one or more of those components (Cajete). Traditional healing ceremonies, including sweat lodge ceremonies, have been described as holistic experiences that improve emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual well-being (Walkingstick-Garrett and Osborne, 1995; Ross & Ross, 1992; Winton, 1997). However, there is a paucity of theoretical literature on traditional medicine or how it is distinct from Western-European concepts of medicine which are linear and concerned with direct cause-effect relationships of biological systems. In contrast, Aboriginal people speak of “all my relations” and honor the connectedness of all things. Mehl-Madrona (2005), suggests that traditional healing has its roots in the concept of coherence: “a non-biological, non-local process that involves shared information rather than mechanical cause and effect” (p. 14), and may offer insight into how “systems can reorganize themselves in ‘interventional fields’”. The concept has been applied diversely in the field of physics and the social sciences. Bateson (1972) suggests that coherence in families can account for the interconnectedness of behaviors, thoughts and feelings in family members. Mehl-Madrona adds that “relationships that engender healing do so …because coherence has developed among participants…people begin to influence each other through non-physical means” (2005, p. 15). In the pilot study on the impact of the sweat lodge ceremony (Waegemakers Schiff & Moore, in press), cluster analysis of participant responses showed a marker shift toward similarity in post sweat lodge responses. Coherence may manifest itself in this way.

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Scale 1
- People have betrayed me
- Important people have let me down
- Life is full of pain
- Life is one heartache after another
- The world is not a safe place
- As a child I could not depend on others to take care of me

Scale 1: Interpretation
- Existential angst of being disconnected and not belonging
- Feeling of vulnerability
- Feeling of not being safe in the world
- Disconnection

<table>
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<th>Factor</th>
<th>NO. of items</th>
<th>Scale Alpha*</th>
<th>ANOVA p</th>
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</table>

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Scale 2
- I put fear aside
- I am good at matching people’s abilities with tasks to be done
- I embrace life fully
- I feel passionate about life
- People look to me for direction
- Inspiration comes easily to me

Scale 2: Interpretation
- Self-efficacy
- Empowerment
- Self-control
- Connection

Scale 3
- I see the present as part of the past
- I believe everyone and everything in the world are interconnected
- I believe there are many good ways to look at the same thing
- I like to transform situations
- I try to be true to myself wherever I am
- Spiritual help accounts for my effectiveness

Scale 3: Interpretation
- Spiritual connection
- Interconnection to the world
- Part of the whole: past, present, future
- Connected to all things

Scale 4
- I find it easier to do for others than to do for myself
- I find satisfaction in caring for others
- Giving makes me happier than receiving
- Sacrificing to help others has made me a better person

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**Scale 4: Interpretation**

Interconnectedness

Ego-less of selflessness

Feminine paradigm

Social worker

For the mothers grandmothers
caretakerTribal mind: caring and sharing

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**Scale 5: Interpretation**

- “carpe diem”
- live fully in the present
- taking risks to improve self
- searching for purpose in life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<th>False</th>
<th>Very True</th>
<th>True</th>
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</thead>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Cultural Spiritual Orientations Scale - continued</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>70. I am in harmony with all living things</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>71. I feel connected with other people in life</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>72. I follow the “Red Road” [i.e., the spiritual path prescribed by tribal tradition]</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>73. When I need to return to balance, I know what to do</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>74. I feel like I am living the right way</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>75. I give to others and receive from them in return</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76. I am a person of integrity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**References**


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