

a few provinces, such as British Columbia, have Aboriginal justice strategies that include cultural awareness training for officials and contracting with Aboriginal communities to provide spiritual leadership, counselling, and cultural programming for prisoners.¹⁵¹

The need for cultural programs in jail was expressed by a former residential school student who was an inmate at a correctional facility in Yellowknife. The Survivor told the Commission, “It would be nice if our own people would come in here and teach us about life ... you know, how to live. This is not the way of life for us. It’s not the way for us people. But if they would teach a program like that, that will catch somebody for sure.”¹⁵²

There are some federal programs that appear to be working, but Aboriginal inmates do not have access to these programs in all parts of the country. For example, although Aboriginal healing lodges within correctional facilities have great potential to assist Aboriginal inmates, there are only four such lodges run by Correctional Services Canada and four run by Aboriginal communities under Section 81 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.¹⁵³ Lack of funding and difficulties in recruiting and training staff are obstacles to successful expansion of the healing lodge resources. In addition, prisoners must be classified as “minimum security” to be eligible, and 90% of Aboriginal inmates are assigned “medium” or “maximum” security classifications.

Calls to Action

- 35) We call upon the federal government to eliminate barriers to the creation of additional Aboriginal healing lodges within the federal correctional system.
- 36) We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work with Aboriginal communities to provide culturally relevant services to inmates on issues such as substance abuse, family and domestic violence, and overcoming the experience of having been sexually abused.

Parole and community supports

Aboriginal offenders face many challenges in obtaining parole from prison and beginning their transition back into the community. For many Aboriginal inmates seeking parole, their criminal history is a major factor held against them. Although some research has concluded that criminal history is a reliable risk predictor for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal inmates, systemic discrimination related to poverty and the legacy of residential schools undoubtedly disadvantages Aboriginal offenders.¹⁵⁴ Just as some courts have the benefit of background and contextual information contained in pre-sentencing reports, parole hearings need a full understanding of an offender’s circumstances when making their decisions.