

## **Ahtahkakoop : Opioid Substitution Therapy at a First Nation Location.**

Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation is a reserve area located at Sandy Lake some ninety kilometres northwest of Prince Albert, and a hundred and sixty five kilometres north of Saskatoon. It has a population base of about three thousand, of which approximately half live on reserve.

Despite its scenic location and relative isolation, it has the rather sad distinction of having the highest incidence of HIV infection in Canada. This, and an equally alarming rate of Hepatitis C infection is directly associated with an extremely high incidence of intravenous drug use.

The Cree Nation Treatment Haven is an on-reserve facility which was established in 1986, as a collaborative effort with three adjacent reserves: Big River, Witchehan and Pelican Lake. Initially conceived as an artistic and cultural resource, it quickly evolved into a multidisciplinary addictions management centre. Housed in an impressive building of log construction, beautifully located on the shores of scenic Sandy Lake, it has twenty residential beds. Services include a five week residential detox course, and a sixteen week outpatient treatment course. The addictions staff are fully certified, and the facility has been consistently accredited for many years.

When the Co-operative Health Centre in Prince Albert first established a methadone based harm reduction program at the turn of the century, Ahtahkakoop and the adjacent reserves quickly made up a significant proportion of the out of town client base. As use of this urban based program expanded, so did the transportation difficulties. Medical taxi services were unable to cope with the demand, and, not surprisingly, the need to hitch-hike one hundred and eighty or more kilometres daily year round, proved a major obstacle to consistent adherence for most participants.

In 2009 the Treatment Haven, in partnership with the Co-operative Health Centre, and the Prince Albert Community Clinic established what I believe to be the first reserve based methadone maintenance recovery program in Saskatchewan.

Initially the program started with one part time nurse, and about ten of our more stable patients transferred from the Prince Albert program. A physician visited occasionally as needed and available, to refill and adjust prescriptions. Today we have a full time registered nurse, our own on site counselor/co-ordinator, and visiting physician services consistently two days per month. There is significant

interaction between our addictions management programs, and the visiting infectious diseases services now available at the adjacent Health Centre.

Patient/client assessment and follow up is done entirely on site, as is case co-ordination and counseling. Our current case load is well in excess of sixty, and since the program's inception we have handled over two hundred individuals. The program remains heavily reliant on our registered nurse who is available daily for routine program management and drug administration. All prescriptions are faxed to the MediCenter Pharmacy in Prince Albert. Methadone is dispensed in individual single dose bottles for witnessed administration by the nurse. All controlled and contract drugs are administered and witnessed daily. Many other drug regimes, notably infectious disease protocols, are co-ordinated and administered daily to ensure consistency. Drug transportation and storage is in heavy duty locked boxes. On reserve carries are not permitted. Building security is good.

In co-operation with the program nurse, I hope to present a five year overview and personal perspective on the history, and development of this innovative program. This will include an up to date statistical review of our progress, an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of a home made approach to dealing with a persistent health care crisis, and a look at possible future developments.

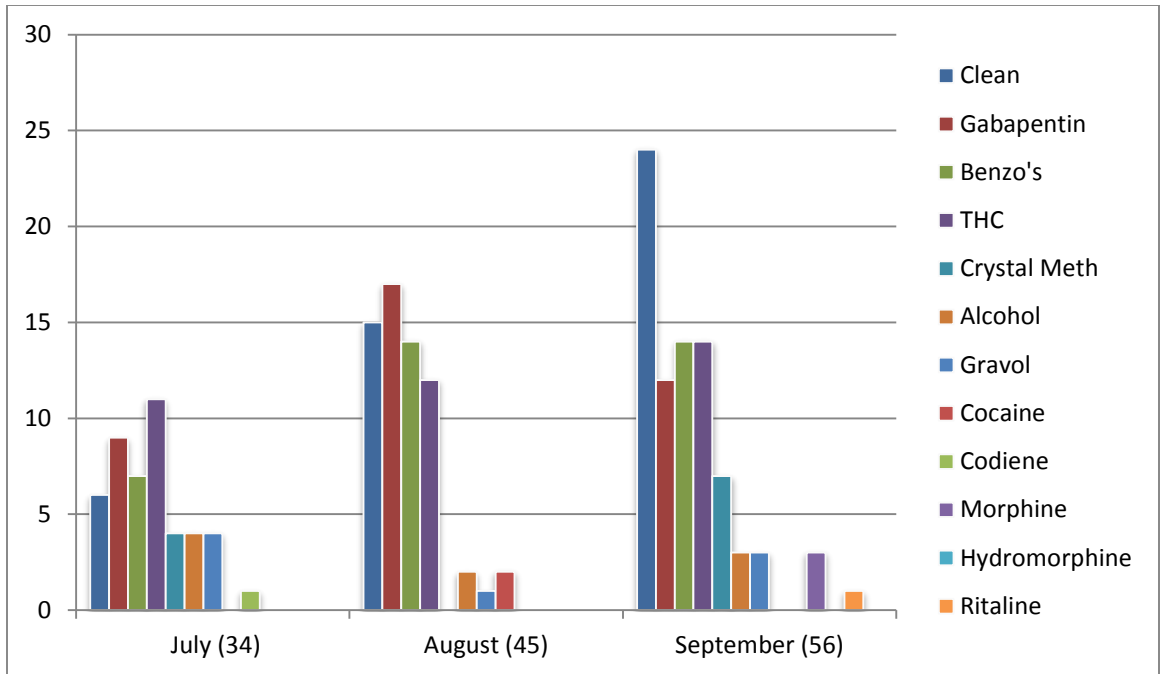
David J Crawford

Disclosure.

I have no relationships that might pose a conflict of interest.

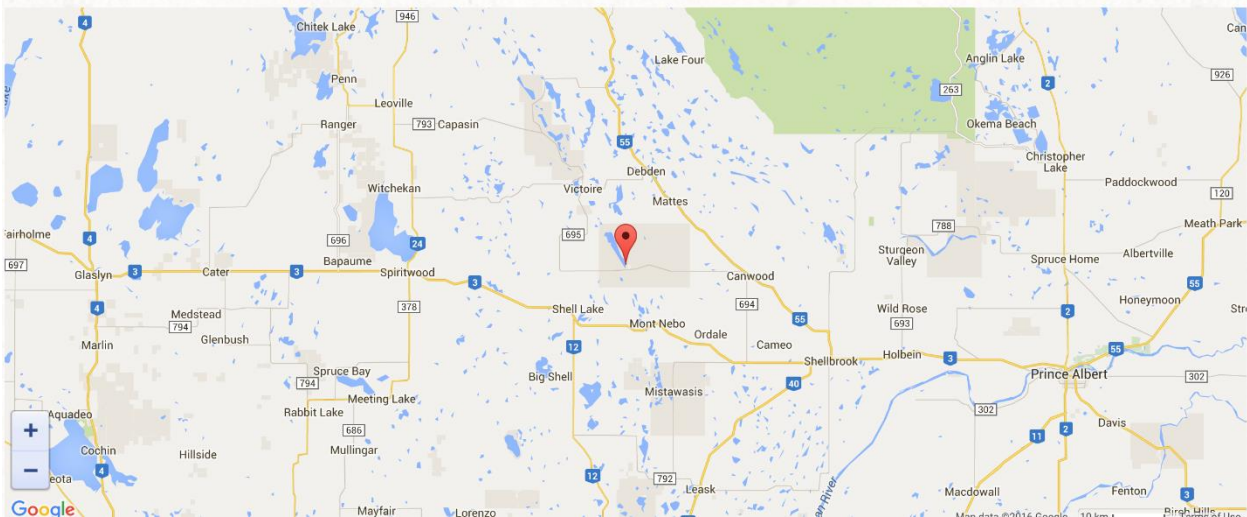
This presentation was developed without support from commercial entities.

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### Location and Directions

The Cree Nations Heritage Centre is located on Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation of Treaty Six in the Province of Saskatchewan Canada. It is situated on Sandy Lake approximately 100 km west of Prince Albert.



# HIV RATES PER 100,000



CANADA

**5.9**

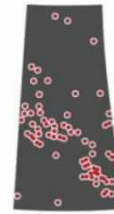
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SASKATCHEWAN

**11.4**

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ON-RESERVE

**63.6**

(2012)

## COMPARABLE AFRICAN HIV RATES BY POPULATION

