

## Friendship House Healing Model

The Friendship House Association of American Indians (Friendship House or FH) is a nonprofit, community-based organization located in San Francisco and was established in 1963 to serve American Indians who were relocated from their reservations to the San Francisco Bay Area. The FH Healing Model, developed over 40 years ago, is an indigenous model that honors traditional wisdom and lived experiences, and integrates cultural values, ceremonies, and community support into pathways for healing for the population of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) adults, youth and children. This model is the basis for the FH Community Defined Evidence Practice (CDEP) which is guided by principles found in American Indian culture, history, and traditions.

**Traditional Practices Sustainability Objective:** By emphasizing indigenous knowledge and mentorship, this framework empowers new leaders and healers and helps sustain tribal and intertribal traditions for generations to come. For example, in 2015, Friendship House established contracts with two traditional healers for services. Ten years later, the number of FH traditional healers, practitioners, and counselors increased to 27 Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

## Friendship House CDEP Study

The Friendship House Healing Model and Community Defined Evidence Practice (CDEP) Study utilizes a non-experimental study design, measuring variables as they naturally occur through FH programs and studied through the lens of tribal and intertribal healing practices to answer the following: *Does the integration of AI/AN healing practices into service delivery efforts have a positive impact on program recipients' wellness (mental, spiritual, physical emotional), social and economic engagement, home stability, and cultural connectedness?* The traditional practices for FH CDEP examination during the 3-year study period included Traditional Counsel (Group and Individual), Sweat Lodge, Talking Circle, Drum Circle, Walking the Red Road Medicine Way, and Cultural Gatherings.

## Key Takeaway & Next Steps

Future CDEP studies are needed:

- To further understand the significance, depth, and complexity of AI/AN cultural practices and how these continue to influence healing, wellness and resilience for AI/ANs across the lifespan.
- To further identify Return On Investment savings for taxpayer costs and to examine what is changed when the burden of living with undertreated/untreated mental health and substance use disorders is reduced.

## Land Acknowledgement



The Friendship House Healing Center stands on the ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone, the original inhabitants of the San Francisco peninsula. We pay our respect to the ancestors, elders and relatives of the Ramaytush Community.

## Friendship House Healing Model and CDEP Visual



## Friendship House Traditional Practices by Participant Count (October 1, 2022 - September 30, 2025)

77% (424/551) of residential clients participated in at least one FH ceremonial practice. 27 Traditional Healers, Counselors, Practitioners, and Helpers led FH Traditional Healing Practices. Participant counts by ceremonial activities:

- 424 (unduplicated) residents participated in Talking Circle (119 sessions total)  
**For Scalability Objective:** 22 Youth/Young Adults participated in Talking Circle through the FH Youth Program (FHYP)
- 154 (unduplicated) residents participated in Drum Circle (44 sessions)
- 247 (unduplicated) residents participated in Sweat Lodge Ceremony (78 sessions)  
**For Scalability Objective:** 24 Youth/Young Adults participated in Sweat Lodge through FHYP
- 353 (unduplicated) residents participated in Walking the Red Road Medicine Way (69 sessions)
- 33 (unduplicated) residents participated in 38 Traditional Healer - Individual Counseling sessions
- 383 (unduplicated) residents participated in 89 Traditional Healer - Group sessions
- 4,038 participant encounters were tracked across 54 cultural gatherings and outreach events

## Population Outcomes - Friendship House Residential Clients

In assessing outcomes for clients of the Friendship House Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Program, baseline (n=551) and 6-months post enrollment data (n=273) was collected using the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) tool. To further analyze GPRA Measures, a paired t-test analysis was conducted. 273 participants were matched between the pre- and post-test measures. Selected pre/post-test items included Abstinence, Mental Health, Risky Behavior, Justice Involvement, Employment and Education, and Housing Stability. **All measures showed significant change from baseline to follow-up, with some measures (risky behavior, mental health, employment, education, and housing stability) reflecting significant change across all associated analyses.**

For overall service satisfaction, **96% of residents rated Friendship House services as "good to excellent"** and 4% rated FH services as "adequate".

**From baseline to 6-month follow-up:**

- Abstinence increased** from 18% to **83%** ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Depression decreased** from 62% to **33%** ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Anxiety decreased** from 73% to **47%** ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Injection Drug Use decreased** from 5% to **0.4%** ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Arrest-Free Records increased** from 93% to **99%** ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Education/Job Placement increased** from 10% to **58%** ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Stable Housing increased** from 65% to **96%** ( $p < 0.001$ )

## Stakeholder Feedback - Youth and Young Adults

To assess resilience, protective factors, and cultural connections, **78 individuals completed the FH Youth and Young Adults Survey.** In general, survey respondents indicated strong cultural identity, cultural connections, personal resourcefulness and resilience. Positive cultural identity and strong cultural connections are noted as consistent protective factors for Friendship House youth and young adult participants, as reported in annual evaluation reports and studies since 2018.

**91%** of youth & young adult survey participants feel a strong connection to their Tribe.

**89%** reported that their family members participated in ceremony activities with them.

**91%** or more feel that there are many things that they do well, have high goals for themselves including going to college, and feel they can be a leader in their community if given the opportunity.

## Stakeholder Feedback - Community Members

To support CBPR efforts, community members (n=222) rated the greatest needs for the Bay Area AI/AN community (13 choices): Number One Selection - Dental Health Services (53%).

In addition, participants were asked to rate issues that affect their household the most (13 choices): Number One Selection - Cost of Living Expenses (52%).

**Greatest Needs for the Bay Area AI/AN community:**

- Number One Selection – Dental Health Services (53%)**
- Issues that Affect Your Household the Most:**
- Number One Selection – Cost of Living Expenses (52%)**

## About Study Participants

**Adult residents of the FH substance abuse treatment program included 551 residential clients.** For race, 78% were AI/ANs (inclusive of AI/AN multiracial counts), 11% were White, 3% were Black or African American, 2% were Asian, 1% were multi-racial (non-AI/AN), 2% were Other. For tribal affiliation, **97 unique AI/AN tribes/tribal bands were represented through the residential client population of FH.** Of those, **46% (45/97) were from CA Tribes.**

**Youth and Young Adult Survey Participants (n=78):** For age range: 4% of survey respondents were 8-10 years of age. 22% were 11-14, 18% were 15-17, 28% were 18-24, and 28% were 25 years of age or older. For tribal and cultural affiliations: **Most of the respondents were affiliated with (AI/AN) tribes (77%).** A smaller percentage reported cultural affiliation as White, Black/African American, Chinese, Hispanic, German, Mexican, and Irish.

**Community Member Survey Participants (n=299).** For Race (n=260): **58% of survey respondents were AI/AN,** 11% were White, 5% were Black or African American, 5% were Asian, 19% were multiracial and 3% of the population was Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander or Biracial. **34% of community members reported San Francisco as the city where they lived.**



This work was made possible in part by funds received from CA Dept of Public Health, Office of Health Equity's California Reducing Disparities Project, Contract #16-10531.