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Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation to collaborate on addiction treatment services
Michigan tribe is the first tribal health system to join the Hazelden Betty Ford Patient Care Network

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich., and CENTER CITY, Minn. — The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation today welcomed the largest tribe east of the Mississippi — the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians — as the newest member of its Patient Care Network, a growing group of like-minded health care organizations working together to expand addiction treatment services and improve patient outcomes.

Dr. Aaron Payment, Chairperson of the Sault Tribe, said, “American Indians have long endured the impacts of forced assimilation, economically depressed rural communities, and the cycle of lack of opportunity which perpetuates a state of social anomie or historical trauma with adverse outcomes like the highest rates of alcoholism, suicides, overdoses and accidents related to substance abuse.” According to the CDC, American Indian and Alaska Natives had the highest drug overdose death rates nationally and the largest percentage increase (500 percent) in overdose deaths from 1999-2015.

The Sault Tribe Health Division, located in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, is the first tribal health system in the nation to join the Hazelden Betty Ford Patient Care Network, and the second member from Michigan—the other being Harbor Hall, an addiction treatment provider in Petoskey.

“We are excited to strategically collaborate with the industry leaders at Hazelden Betty Ford,” said Dr. Leo Chugunov, governing director of the Sault Tribe Health Division. “This partnership will help us respond to the needs of our tribal members and the community at large by expanding our substance use treatment and recovery services and enhancing our integrated health and wellness center in Sault Ste. Marie.”

While the Sault Tribe has long endeavored to provide services to combat alcoholic and drug addiction, in 2012, the tribe held a summit to identify how to deal with an increasing number of drug overdoses. The outcome was the creation of a tribal action plan. A primary objective was to facilitate better and more sustainable data driven treatment options.

Chugunov and his team and the Sault Tribe Administration are leading an effort to build a new state-of-the-art recovery hospital that will be part of the Health Division. The recovery hospital will eventually become home to the tribe’s growing array of addiction treatment services.

“Joining the Hazelden Betty Ford Patient Network is a big milestone that will enable us to move forward with our plans for the Recovery Hospital and ensure we’re providing the very best addiction treatment services that exist,” Chugunov said.

Network membership provides the Sault Tribe with access to additional evidence-based clinical tools, educational resources, and consultation on best practices and program design from the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, the nation’s leading nonprofit addiction treatment organization, and its network of quality providers. The network facilitates shared learnings and collaboration among its members while also extending the continuum of care for each organization.

“Hazelden Betty Ford’s evidence-based approach to helping people overcome addiction aligns nicely with the Sault Tribe’s quality programs and services, so we’re thrilled to have them join our network and eager to assist with their expansion,” Bob Poznanovich, Hazelden Betty Ford’s vice president of business

development, said. “Reaching more remote areas like the Upper Peninsula is important for our Patient Care Network. It’s great to have another outstanding, trusted partner there.”

Payment added, “I am so grateful to the tribal council, our tribal employment team members and volunteers who have identified the need for data driven and evidence based efforts to facilitate a long term road to recovery and revitalization of our Anishinabe Biimaadziwin (our good way of life). Our collaboration with Hazelden Betty Ford will create a national model to help our people heal from the wounds of historical trauma. We look forward to sharing our challenges and successes with all of Indian Country.”

The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation is a national nonprofit that provides comprehensive inpatient and outpatient addiction treatment for adults and youth. It has 17 sites across the country as well as extensive education, prevention, research, advocacy and publishing resources.

The Hazelden Betty Ford Patient Network—the first of its kind in the addiction treatment industry—was launched in the fall of 2017. Members are vetted to ensure they share the network’s commitment to effective, evidence-based practices; collaboration; and improving patient outcomes.

“The power of strategic collaboration to improve patient outcomes offers great hope for our field and for the millions of individuals, families and communities affected by addiction to alcohol and other drugs,” Poznanovich said. “As a center of excellence in our field, we are dedicated to sharing our own expertise, learning from other high-quality providers like the Sault Tribe Health Division, and changing lives together.”

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