

The Wicozani Instrument: A Measure of Overall Health and Well-Being

[Peters, H. J., Peterson, T. R., & Dakota Wicohan Community \(2019\). Developing an Indigenous Measure of Overall Health and Well-being: The Wicozani Instrument. *Journal of American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 27, 96-121.](#)

Introduction. Dakota Wicohan, a Native nonprofit, in partnership with the University of Minnesota Morris developed a brief strength-based measure of overall health and well-being. The Wicozani Instrument is grounded in Indigenous paradigms emphasizing relationality and interconnectedness of mental, physical, and spiritual health. While there is diversity among Native communities, the Instrument may appeal to many Native communities because health is defined from an Indigenous perspective.

Need. The decimation of Native culture and life ways, through colonization and assimilation policies and subsequent historical trauma¹ have been linked to health disparities between Natives and the broader U.S. population^{2,3}. Taking an Indigenous, rather than Western approach, to address health disparities can begin changing the current perception that Native identity is a risk factor for poor health.

The Measure. The Wicozani Instrument is a 9-item measure that is accessible to youth and adults. Results from two studies⁴ provide evidence of the instrument's reliability and validity and the usefulness of assessing overall health and well-being from an Indigenous view. The Instrument has two subscales: 1) the Wicozani Self-Knowledge subscale (i.e., questions 2, 4, & 6), assesses an individual's perception of their current *wicozani*; and 2) the Importance of Wicozani to Quality of Life subscale (i.e., questions 7, 8, & 9), is the antecedent subscale that assesses how important an individual's *wicozani* is to their quality of life and was designed to capture an individual's desire for overall health and well-being. Results found that participant scores were significantly higher on the Importance of Wicozani to Quality of Life subscale than the Wicozani Self-Knowledge subscale.

Benefits. The Wicozani Instrument:

- places power in the hands of the individual;
- values the individual's ways of knowing;
- views the individual's perspective as valid;
- changes the deficit-based narrative around Native health;
- provides individuals with the opportunity to:
 - create their own definitions and factors of health;
 - identify where they are at on their continuum of health;
 - take ownership over their health;
 - see themselves as healthy; and
 - build on existing areas of healthy behavior.

Use. Health professionals can use the difference between the two subscales to motivate behavior change by eliciting from the client why and how their *wicozani* is important to their quality of life and strategies they would like to engage in to increase their *wicozani*. This approach is in line with central tenants of motivational interviewing (e.g., raising awareness of the discrepancy between the goal and actual behavior, an emphasis on personal choice, facilitating change⁵).

Conclusion. Approaches that place Native people and their ideologies at the center of the solution, rather than on the receiving end of Western ideology and health care, support a movement of decolonization and reclamation of Native identity and epistemologies as strengths and facilitate effective approaches that align with community-defined health and well-being. To review the full article, please visit the below website and look at the 5th article under Volume 26, Issue No. 2 (2019).

https://coloradosph.cuanschutz.edu/docs/librariesprovider205/journal_files/vol26/26_2_2019_96_peters.pdf?sfvrsn=affe0b9_2

¹ Mohatt NV, Thompson AB, Thai ND, & Tebes JK (2014). Historical trauma as public narrative: A conceptual review of how history impacts present-day health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 106, 128–136. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.01.043>

² Espey DK, Jim MA, Cobb N, Bartholomew M, Becker T, Haverkamp D, & Plescia M (2014). Leading causes of death and all-cause mortality in American Indians and Alaska Natives. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104, S303–S311. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301798>

³ Minnesota Department of Health. (2014). Advancing health equity in Minnesota: Report to the legislature. Retrieved from https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/reports/ahc_leg_report_020114.pdf

⁴ Peters, H. J., Peterson, T. R., & Dakota Wicohan Community (2019). Developing an Indigenous Measure of Overall Health and Well-being: The Wicozani Instrument. *Journal of American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 27, 96-121. DOI:10.5820/aian.2602.2019.96

⁵ Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (1991). *Motivational interviewing preparing people to change addictive behavior*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

The Wicozani Instrument

Please complete each question to the best of your ability.

1) How does someone know if their “*Mind*” is healthy? (your thoughts and emotions)

2) How do you rate your “*mental health*” (please circle)? (your thoughts and emotions)

Extremely Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

3) How does someone know if their “*body*” is healthy?

4) How do you rate your “*physical health*” (please circle)? (your body)

Extremely Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

5) How does someone know if their “*spirit*” is healthy? (your religious or spiritual beliefs)

6) How do you rate your “*spiritual health*” (please circle)? (your religious or spiritual beliefs)

Extremely Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

7) How important is your “*mental health*” to your quality of life (please circle)?

Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neither Important or Unimportant	Important	Very Important
1	2	3	4	5

8) How important is your “*physical health*” to your quality of life (please circle)?

Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neither Important or Unimportant	Important	Very Important
1	2	3	4	5

9) How important is your “*spiritual health*” to your quality of life (please circle)?

Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neither Important or Unimportant	Important	Very Important
1	2	3	4	5

How to Score (move the below information to the back of the page prior to giving to individuals):

The Wicozani Self Knowledge Subscale: Add questions 2, 4, and 6 and divide by 3.

$$2) \underline{\quad} + 4) \underline{\quad} + 6) \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad} / 3 = \underline{\quad}$$

The Importance of Wicozani to Quality of Life subscale: Add questions 7, 8, and 9 and divide by 3.

$$7) \underline{\quad} + 8) \underline{\quad} + 9) \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad} / 3 = \underline{\quad}$$