

Decolonizing Treatment

2026 Zarrow Mental Health Symposium
Instructor: Len Pierre, CEO



Decolonization

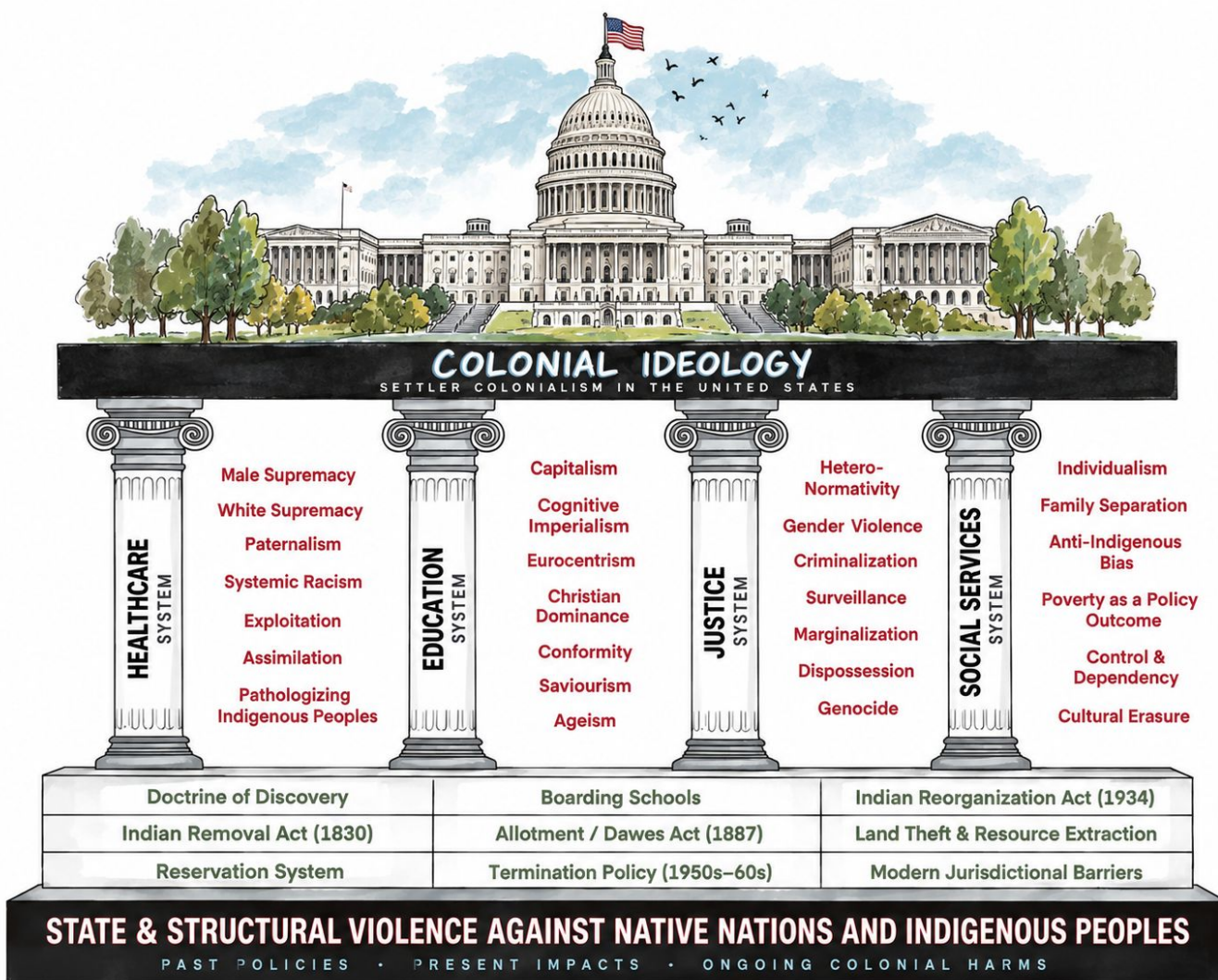


“Is less about returning to a pre-colonial society, and more about recognizing we live under a colonial system. It is about recognizing that things are the way they are because a particular ideology systematically erased others while normalizing itself. Once something is normalized, it’s hard to imagine anything else.”

— Pere Huriwai-Seger

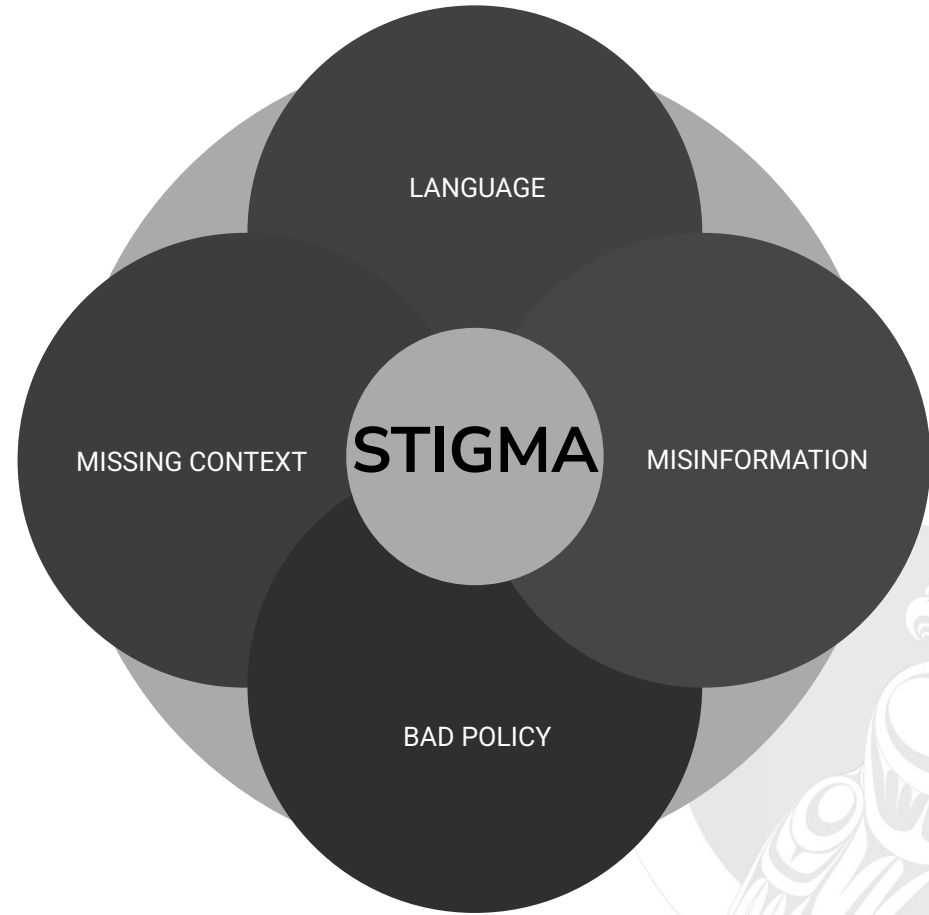








IDEOLOGY =



“

“There is no war on drugs, because you can’t war on inanimate objects.

There is only a war on [people who use drugs], which means we are warring on the most abused and vulnerable segments of society.”

DR GABOR MATE





What are the Goals of Drug Prohibition?

Decrease
substance use

Drugs are easier to get and widely available

Increase cost of drugs

Drugs are cheap and purchasable

Prevent people from
using drugs

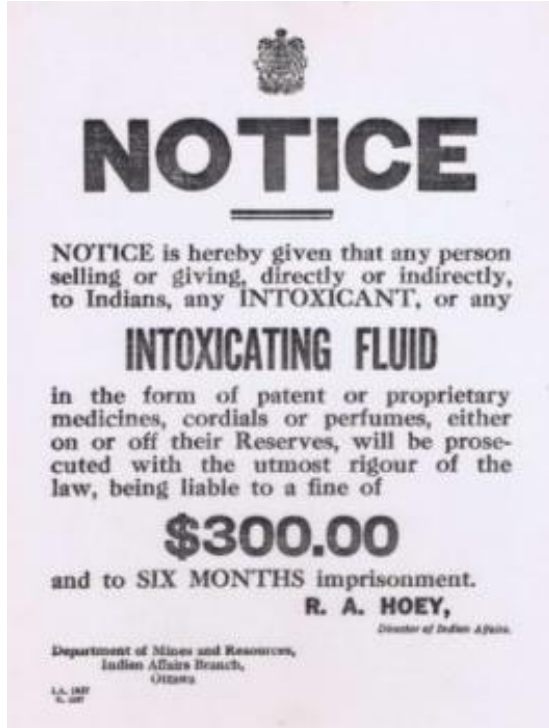
Used widely by all social and
economic classes

Deter people from
the drug trade

Lucrative, prisons are full of people
dealing in drugs



Canadian Racism and Prohibition



- Illegality of alcohol on Indian reservations for 100+ years
- \$300 fine
- Imprisonment up to six months
- Fear of mixing white and Indian blood
- System of control





The War on Drugs

- Was born out of racism
- Has nothing to do with the health and wellbeing of population
- Is a war on our most marginalized peoples
- Trillion dollar failure
- Toxic drug deaths
- HIV & HCV
- Survival Crime



THE AMERICAN ISSUE

A Semimonthly Journal of the American People

Volume 1, No. 1

WINDY CITY, ILLINOIS, JANUARY 16, 1919

Number 1

U.S. IS VOTED DRY

36th STATE RATIFIES DRY AMENDMENT

Nebraska Noses Out Missouri for Honor of Completing Its
Into the Constitution; Wyoming, Wisconsin and Minnesota

JANUARY 16, 1919, MOMENTOUS DAY IN W

Ratification Accomplished in a Little Less Than Thirteen Months with Three States More
Resolution gave Period of Seven Years for the Completion of Task Remaining Once This
This Act, With Possible Exception of New Jersey, United States Takes Initial Step in
Some and National Leagues Now Give Serious Attention to Law Enforcement Legislation



American Prohibition in the 1930'ss



What are Some of the Harms Associated with Substance Use?





The Real Harm Behind Drugs

Harm	Drug
Euphoria	?
Withdrawal	?
Overdose	
Viral Infections	
Bacteria Infections	
Violence	
Illegal Activity	





The Real Harm Behind Drugs

Harm	Drug	War on Drugs
Euphoria	?	
Withdrawal	?	
Overdose		✓
Viral Infections		✓
Bacteria Infections		✓
Violence		✓
Illegal Activity		✓











DRUGS ALCOHOL EXERCISE
PAIN ADDICTION CANNIBIS
WORK SEX
FOOD
GAMBLING PHONE/TECH



TRAUMA | GRIEF | LOSS | STRESS



Fear & Shame
Isolation
Helplessness



Detachment
Loss of Identity
Loss of Rights



Poverty
Lack of Housing
Loss of Freedom



Residential
Schools



The 60's
Scoop



Land
Theft

Colonialism



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness



safety integrity responsibility
creativity emotions
empowerment generosity
contribution love purpose

connection

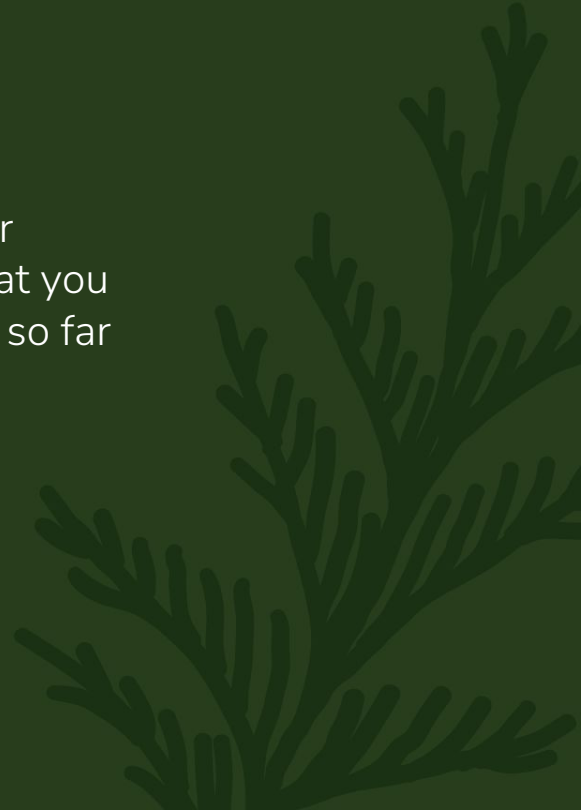


First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

PAUSE!

Take 3 minutes:

- Turn to your neighbour
- Offer a reaction to what you have heard or learned so far





What we hear:

Addict

User

Clean/Sober

What we want to say:

People who use

People who drink

Healing Journey





Decolonizing Treatment

Language

We mobilize people-first language and opt for less pathologizing language.

Misinformation

We dispel and call out incorrect information related to healing and substance use/mental health. We RETHINK education.

Missing Context

We continually ask ourselves: what contextual factors lead to mental health and substance use?

Bad Policy

We challenge oppressive systems, speak truth to power, and advocate for evidence proven and equity-informed policies

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**“Safety is not the absence of
threat... it is the presence of
connection”**

DR. GABOR MATE

