Inuit sayakturut, aġiruat: The people are healthy, they are dancing

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ABSTRACT:
Alaskan Indigenous peoples have known music and dance as playing a role in healing processes for millennia. Group singing, drumming and dancing is recognized in a one-health Indigenous view regarding ways of negotiating and alleviating individual health issues as well as promoting community health. The Kingikmiut Dancers and Singers of Anchorage, an urban Inupiaq dance group with ancestral ties to the Native Village of Wales, began dancing and singing as a way of claiming a healthy lifestyle for Inupiaq people living in Anchorage, Alaska’s largest urban center. As an Indigenous participant-observer in the Kingikmiut Dancers and Singers of Anchorage, the author experienced the benefits of singing and dancing with the group. She also observed elders as they navigated their age-related health conditions through participation in regular dance practices and performances, and also witnessed social cohesion of the group as they continue to practice and perform their cultural heritage. This paper also provides evidence from scientists and musicologists that corroborate with ancient methods of maintaining health and promoting community healing. Inupiaq dancing and singing not only provides individual practitioners with health benefits such as increased aerobic exercise, but also strengthens communities as a cohesion-building activity. Recent scientific studies confirm what Indigenous peoples had already long established: that group singing and dancing is healthy for people.