

School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs)

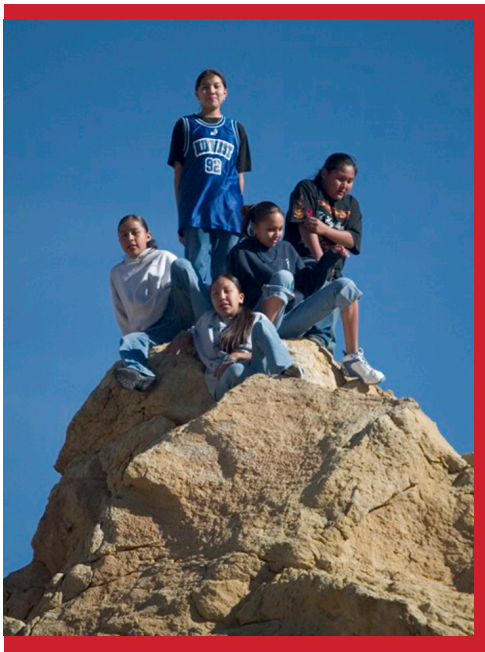
Respond to the Health Needs of Native American Youth

Health Care Needs of Native American Youth

In comparison with other ethnic groups, Native American youth bear a disproportionate share of poor health status indicators, particularly in the areas of youth obesity, youth suicide, motor vehicle deaths, and late or no prenatal care.¹ Many Native American youth live in rural communities, have limited transportation, and must travel great distances to access health care. Ensuring that culturally sensitive health practices are used is critical to addressing the health needs of Native American youth.

Native Americans continue to rank at or near the bottom of nearly every social, health and economic indicator.²

SBHCs Offer Hope for Success



Native American-serving SBHCs are helping by providing services to youth at school, where they spend the majority of their time. There are 32 Native American-serving SBHCs in New Mexico that offer a unique opportunity for addressing the many health and health care access challenges facing Native American youth. SBHCs help address the critical need for culturally competent primary care and behavioral health services and foster healing by building trusting relationships.

In New Mexico, Native American-serving SBHCs and the communities they serve have experienced a number of successes by focusing on the unique cultural strengths and resources in the community. One important way this is done is through Youth Advisory Groups and School Health Advisory Councils. They provide community and youth input into the functioning of the SBHC. Successes thus far include some SBHCs' obtaining Indian Health Service, tribal, and community support to provide comprehensive health services that include traditional healing and cultural practices. Some SBHCs have responded to very high rates of youth suicide in their communities by successfully implementing prevention projects such as Native HOPE, a youth suicide awareness program.

Challenges

Native American-serving SBHCs face unique challenges. Some SBHCs are supported solely by the Indian Health Service (IHS), but due to limited funding these SBHCs are challenged to provide all needed services. Additionally, funds generated by IHS-supported SBHCs go to the IHS and not necessarily back to the SBHC. These challenges are amplified by the fact that the Bureau of Indian Education and IHS have no dedicated structure to support the work of SBHCs. Some Native American-serving SBHCs have obtained funding from the New Mexico Department of Health and grant programs such as the NM Community Foundation's, Elev8 NM program. The New Mexico Alliance for School-Based Health Care continues to help all SBHCs become financially stable.

For students to learn all they can, they have to be healthy. Access to healthcare is essential, and this new [SBHC] center is an important step in ensuring all our students have an equal opportunity to receive health services that will result in students being successful not only in school, but later on in the careers they choose.

-Laguna Pueblo Governor John E. Antonio, Sr.

References

1. CDC WISQARS and NMYRRS 2005
2. A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights July 2003