



Native Health in Phoenix, Arizona



Introduction

Community health centers provide comprehensive primary and prevention services in medically underserved areas and communities. Collectively, they serve more than 28 million people at 11,000 sites located throughout all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories. Health centers provide care to all individuals, regardless of their ability to pay. All health centers provide a full range of primary and preventive services, as well as services that enable patients to access health care appropriately (e.g., translation, health education, transportation). A growing number of Health Centers also provide dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, and other important supplemental services.

Native Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) and Urban Indian Health Program based in Arizona, serves more than 8,700 patients annually in Phoenix and the surrounding communities of Maricopa County. The health center provides medical, dental, behavioral health, and health and wellness services in four locations for individuals of all ages and cultural backgrounds, with a specialized focus on the urban Native American community.

Targeting the specific needs of underserved and vulnerable patients is a primary goal of Native Health and enabling services are essential to this effort. By offering an extensive range of enabling services, Native Health functions as a one-stop community resource center, as well as a health center. Enabling services are tailored based on community feedback. The health center uses patient satisfaction surveys and community needs assessments to drive decision-making and evaluate services and programming. The center even offers community members and patients an app that lets them directly text the center's CEO with ideas and reactions.

Native Health's suite of enabling services are specifically designed to address food insecurity. Identified as a critical need in the community, Native Health's primary health center is located in a food desert, with a 20-minute drive to the nearest grocery store. By taking advantage of every opportunity to provide patients with access to healthy foods and education, Native Health acts as a food oasis for underserved communities where food insecurity is a leading contributor to poor health and social outcomes.

Types of Enabling Services Provided

The foundation of Native Health's food programming comes from leveraging its partnerships with food banks, benefits agencies, and other community-based organizations in Phoenix. The following services are available to community members as a result of these partnerships:

Co-located Benefits Eligibility

Services State agencies provide co-located, onsite eligibility determinations for Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at Native Health sites. While staff complete online applications, approval decisions are made by embedded agency staff, which speeds up the process by weeks. More specifically, as a result of offering benefits eligibility services on-site, it makes Native Health a destination for families and it makes them more comfortable and our partners know that.

Mobile Produce Market

In one location, Native Health hosts Farm Express, a local mobile produce market aimed at food deserts. Through Farm Express, community members can use their SNAP benefits to purchase discounted fresh produce every two weeks.



NATIVE HEALTH AT-A-GLANCE

Patients Seen Annually: 8,767

Staff: 185

Staff providing Enabling Services: 30+

Locations: 4 urban locations in central Phoenix, Mesa AZ

Service Area: Maricopa County, AZ

Payer Mix: Medicaid, Self-pay, Medicare, Private

community garden at Agave Farms. Through the program, 34 families adopt rows and grow their own fresh produce. The gardens generate more than 3,000 pounds of fresh produce a year for Native Health’s food programs, supplementing food distribution, and providing themes and supplies for cooking classes. Monthly gardening workshops incorporate healthy and cost-conscious recipes and tastings. The garden even provides free offerings for all in “share baskets” in the lobbies.

Addressing Food Insecurity for Vulnerable Populations

Food insecurity increases the likelihood of poor health outcomes for children, including developmental impairments, mental health issues, and chronic conditions such as asthma. Among the communities served by Native Health, families with children are at higher risk of food insecurity. To address the impact of food insecurity on this vulnerable population, Native Health offers multiple innovative food programs specifically targeted for children. Native Health was the first community health center in Arizona to launch the Summer Food Service Program at all of their locations, feeding thousands during the summer. When school is in session, in partnership with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and St. Mary’s Food Bank, Native Health offers a “dinner program” that provides a daily meal to children. Through this partnership, St. Mary’s Food Bank also provides children’s food backpacks on a recurring basis. Each backpack can feed a family of four for three meals. Low-income seniors are also able to receive food boxes. The program has a low-barrier approach — there is no eligibility process to receive food, and the program is not limited to enrolled patients.

Food Bank Partnerships

Native Health partners with three local food banks that supply hundreds of pounds of food per week. To ensure that seniors, families, and other community members in need have regular access to healthy food, Native Health provides food boxes and bags, hosts regular food distribution events, and provides daily on-site meals.

Community Gardening Program

To foster a holistic and traditional approach to food security, Native Health supports opportunities for community members to grow their own healthy food. The health center has made a staffing and resource investment in its gardening program and hosts both a traditional garden with indigenous, drought-tolerant, protein-rich plants, and a half-acre

Education to Promote Healthy Food Choices

Educating children and their families about healthy food choices and addressing childhood obesity is an additional goal for the health center. Through a partnership with the Arizona Complete Health and the Phoenix & Mesa Public Libraries, Native Health offers the children’s program Read It and Eat to promote literacy and teach healthy cooking skills to families with young children. The monthly event features family story time for preschool aged children and a cooking class where children and their parents help prepare healthy foods like golden beet “zoodles” or cantaloupe salsa. Families prepare their own meal, taste and share the food, and take home resources, recipes, and ingredients provided by local grocers.

“We have been recognized nationally for our work in food insecurity. We work with multiple food banks and also have gardens that harvest thousands of pounds of food a year. From helping individuals apply for SNAP to connecting them to cooking classes, we incorporate it all.”

**Susan Levy, Communications and
Community Relations Director
Native Health**

Additionally, Native Health offers multiple classes through Cooking Matters, a six-week cooking class series that features both adult- and family-focused sessions. The series teaches parents and adults how to shop for and cook healthy meals on a limited budget. Classes include hands-on cooking lessons, field trips to grocery stores to cover label reading and bulk shopping and produce to take home from each class. Traditional Native and garden-based cooking classes are offered at Native Health’s community garden location at Agave Farms, including a Diabetes 101 class and a Wellness Warriors group for Natives American families who want to learn about healthy living.

Workforce and Infrastructure

Native Health’s food programming is driven by the philosophy that linking patients to all available resources is every staff member’s responsibility. As a high-touch, integrated service center, every member of the Native Health team is expected to be knowledgeable about the health center’s range of services. All staff members, from providers to IT team members to Community Health Workers (CHWs), receive two full days of onboarding training on health center services and programs, cultural competency, and motivational interviewing. Refresher courses are offered periodically.

Once trained, staff are expected to take the time to do warm handoffs to enabling services as needed or even to walk patients from place to place within the busy health center. From primary care providers to front-desk staff to executive leadership, all staff are trained to be ready to connect a patient to needed services and supports, be it food for their family, a dental appointment, or community camaraderie through a beading class.

To support warm handoffs, Native Health has a robust team of 30 case managers, CHWs, and health educators. All enabling service providers have a structured curriculum of trainings based on their role, which is informed by their profession’s standards. Staff are also trained on Native Health’s electronic health record and population health management system, which tracks internal referrals and services provided and informs leadership for strategic planning.

Funding

Native Health’s food programming originated from partnerships established with federal, state, and local government agencies and non-profits. Allowing agencies to co-locate services within Native Health clinic locations energized agency leadership and sparked conversations about unmet needs and future partnerships. Ultimately, these visits led to partnerships on pilots and innovative programming with outside agencies providing funds, resources, and even embedded staffing and services.

As an FQHC, Native Health supports its enabling services with federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funding and other grants, which together make up 50 percent of the health center’s total funding. Other funders include government agencies such as Indian Health Services (IHS), which support specific programs targeted to Native community members, and local community-based organizations and foundations. By leveraging the resources and staffs of its 15 external local partners, Native Health is also able to offer embedded services within its health center that extend its scope without having to shoulder the cost alone.

Concluding Thoughts

From benefits enrollment to cultural programming, Native Health is actively addressing food insecurity by providing a wide range of enabling services and creating a welcoming environment that feels more like a community center than a health care facility. As a result, families and community members come to Native Health for many reasons besides clinical services. The health center provides culturally competent enabling services which address social need and creates a healthy community for the urban Natives and the other vulnerable populations it serves.

Bibliography

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NACHC Mission Statement

To promote efficient, high quality, comprehensive health care that is accessible, culturally and linguistically competent, community directed, and patient centered for all.

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