# Strengthening the Circle with Tribal Initiatives on HIV/AIDS

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## Introduction

HIV/AIDS impacts the lives of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people in the United States. Community-based discussions have indicated that the most effective advocacy and leadership to address complex issues like HIV/AIDS arise directly from Tribes and Tribal partnerships with Federal agencies. The Tribal Initiative on HIV/AIDS is an Office of Minority Health Resource Center project which collaborates with the Indian Health Service HIV Program to fund Tribes and Tribal organizations in enhancing HIV/AIDS leadership at the local level. Grantees worked to increase AI/AN advocacy of HIV/AIDS/Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) awareness and meet community education needs.

## **Objectives**

The TIHA project goal is to strengthen HIV/AIDS programs, and services responding to HIV/AIDS that target the American Indians/Alaska Native community at large. Both the FY09 and FY10 grants focused on ways to address and develop Tribal resolutions and policy that addressed HIV/AIDS/STI services. Additionally, the FY10 grants included program support for HIV/AIDS/STI services specifically for the AI/AN LGBT and Two-Spirit community.

Thus, four main objectives of the mini-award grants were determined:

- Enhance or support HIV/AIDS/STD education, awareness, anti-stigma and testing in the community
- Provide funding for HIV/AIDS/STD related activities and services
- Pass official Tribal resolutions, policies or codes that support HIV/AIDS/STD Tribal programs, HIV screening or other HIV services and include LGBT and Two-Spirit communities
- Expand the HIV/AIDS infrastructure and network for all American Indians/Alaska Natives through collaborative and transparent Tribal and Federal partnerships.

## **Materials and methods**

These awardees represented Tribal programs from a wide geographic and capacity range throughout the United States (See Figure 1). Most programs focused on providing community education and engagement activities to increase HIV/AIDS/STI awareness and support local efforts to change or enact appropriate policies and Tribal resolutions. Programs also focused on LGBT and Two-Spirit education, awareness and forming support groups.

Program monitoring included qualitative and quantitative measures that evaluated the impact of activities in the funded communities. There was a mixture of data collection processes and tools used at each of the various sites to demonstrate performance and outcomes measures across the project. This included summarizing data with percentage changes over a period of 12 months. Each site provided these monthly reports that included unduplicated testing numbers, the number of presentations conducted, presentation attendees, HIV sites and events, how many resolutions or policies passed and how many tests were conducted at permanent sites and locations off sites.

## Awarded Sites Covered a Wide Range of Tribal Regions



Figure 1. Program Sites

Program sites included a wide geographic and capacity range and included the following organizations:

- Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
- Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
- Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma • Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
- Ft. Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes
- Tucson Indian Center
- Navajo AIDS Network
- Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
- AIDS Project Los Angeles
- Native American Interfaith Ministries
- Sacred Spirits

## Results

Over a two year period, 11 Tribes and Tribal organizations were awarded funds in the amount of \$13,500 to \$20,000 to conduct this program at the local level. Across all sites, the programs conducted 233 presentations and directly reached a total of 8,512 participants. The sites reported that 4,515 HIV tests were performed in connection with their activities. Specific to community-based outreach, a total of 110 HIV testing events were held, with a total of 1,318 additional HIV tests provided to community members (See Figure 2).

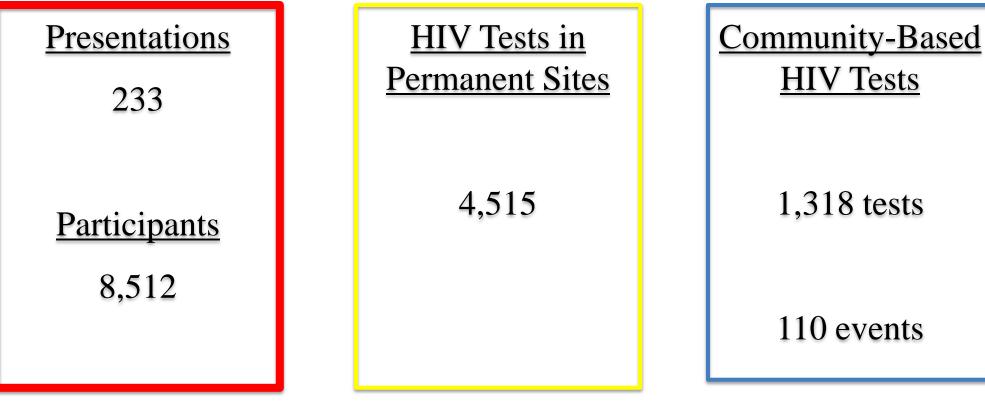


Figure 2. Sites used local knowledge and experiences to reach a large audience.

#### Solutions and resources highlighted by the sites included (See Figure 3):

Policy Change Goals

- Partnership with IHS HIV Program and Project Red Talon to develop Tribal Policy Toolkit
- Linking HIV/AIDS with other disparities
- Increasing HIV Tribal resolutions

#### Education

- Continued education for employees
- Engaging local schools

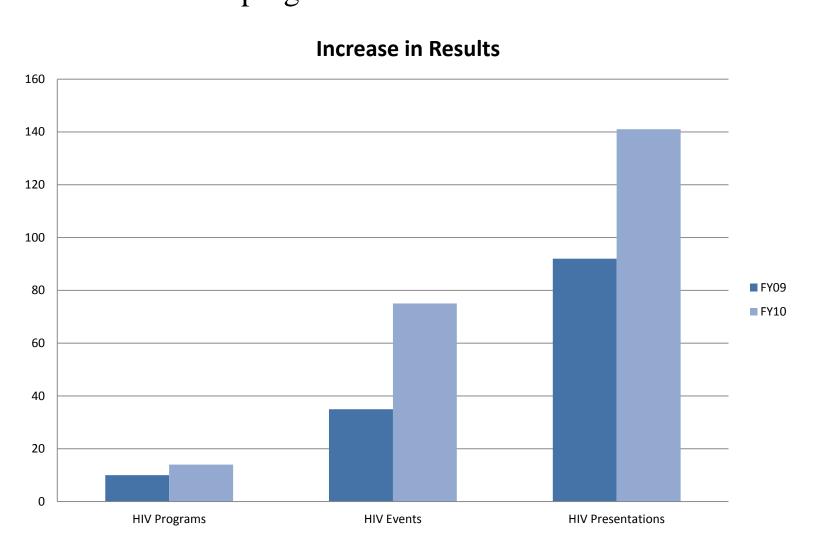
#### Reducing Stigma

- Establishing LGBT and Two-Spirit resources and programs
- Use of volunteers and social media
- Social marketing plans

Linking diverse funding opportunities and creating partnerships

**Figure 3: Community-Based Solutions** Policy Change Education Linking Funding Stigma Reduction

Assessment of the awardees from year-to-year showed an increase in HIV presentations conducted in local community settings, an increase in testing events, and an increase in unduplicated HIV programs or services offered by each Tribe or Tribal program.



## **Observations**

First, offering smaller grant monies to communities was significant because this allowed 3 times as many applicants to write for and compete for the smaller resources. Sites reported that the smaller funding was necessary for communities to sustain and focus HIV efforts in a concentrated manner to supplement or start new programming.

Next, official Tribal action (i.e. policy, code) was sought to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS and to be treated as a critical health issue. It was a direct way to sustain efforts and services, reduce Stigma, and illuminate Tribal support of community health. In both grant periods, there were a total of 8 official Tribal resolutions or HIV policies that were developed. Due to these policies, new programs and services created now have Tribal leadership support.

Lastly, the FY10 grant period also focused on LGBT and Two-Spirit HIV testing, awareness and education programs or services. Communities were encouraged to start culturally appropriate programs for these populations. In doing so, several sites reported that it was making a true difference in the lives of LGBT and Two-Spirit individuals because they did not have any services for them. In communities that are small with little to no support groups and no resources for LGBT and Two-Spirit individuals, these programs showed impact of great retention of clients, increase in testing, increase in event participation and increase in new programs or services.



Image 1: Photo of Awards Ceremony for Two-Spirit Training by Red Circle Project

# Conclusions

Developing and passing Tribal policies to support HIV efforts, keeping HIV on the Tribe's or Tribal program's health agenda, and enlisting the support of elected Tribal leaders are essential steps to overcome local barriers to HIV testing and education. Because stigma is often the greatest barrier to prevention activities, locally-developed programs conducting public community events have been identified by these sites as one of the most cost-effective ways to increase education while decreasing barriers to testing and care among AI/AN people.

The overall number of people that were either educated about HIV/AIDS or tested for HIV/AIDS by these eleven Tribes and Tribal programs represents over 20,954 people or contacts.

> **Overall Impact of Awards** 20,954 people or contacts

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