

# Tribal Communities Improve Access to Healthy Drinks One Water Station at a Time

*Serena Johnson*

## Summary

More than 7,000 residents in Inyo County, California now have increased access to free, self-serve public water stations. To make drinking water the healthy and easy choice, Toiyabe Indian Health Project (TIHP) partnered with Tribal governments, Tribal organizations, and local cities and schools to install water bottle filling stations across the county.

These water stations offer a healthy alternative to sugary drinks and provide the counties' youth improved access to safe drinking water.

## Challenge

According to the 2014 US Census, 3.9 million people (1.7% of U.S. population) identified as American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), with over 80% of AI/AN adults age 20-74 being overweight or obese and 30% of this population estimated to have pre-diabetes (1.6 million people). The National Congress of American Indian's Center for Diabetes Research and Policy Research Center also notes that childhood obesity rates often exceed 50% in Tribal communities and 1 out of 2 AI/AN children will likely develop type 2 diabetes in their lifetime.

In Inyo County, close to half of all youth are at an unhealthy weight. According to a report from the California Center for Public Health Advocacy (2012), the rise in obesity has led experts to predict a decrease in life expectancy and productivity for today's youth.

## Solution

TIHP is working to bring water bottle filling stations to public spaces across Inyo County. Water bottle stations help to increase overall water consumption and maintain hydration. Frequent water consumption can have positive effects on eating and drinking decisions and, potentially, reduce a child's risk of being overweight or obese. Water bottle stations also help reduce disposable water bottle use, benefiting the environment.

Locations for water bottle filling stations were identified through community surveys and partner recommendations. Locations varied across a wide spectrum, from school districts and after-school programs to city and Tribal parks.



## Your Involvement is Key

**Thirsty for more? You can be a part of increasing water access by sharing your knowledge of your community. Where in your community is there a need for a water bottle filling station?**

**Our drinking water is clean and pure, coming from the melting snow pack off the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Getting enough water every day is important for your health.**

## Results

Increasing access to safe, clean drinking water is part of TIHP's larger health initiative to improve the health of Tribal communities in Inyo County. In the last two years, TIHP partnered with ten Tribal, city, and school organizations and governments to install 20 indoor and outdoor water bottle filling stations across four communities and three reservations.

These 20 water bottle filling stations offer more than 7,000 residents and improved access to safe, clean water for drinking. 9 water bottle filling stations were installed inside at schools, health clinics, and after school education centers. 11 water bottle filling stations were installed outside at parks, ball fields, museums, health clinics, after school Tribal education centers, and schools.

### Contact

#### **Serena Johnson**

Toiyabe Indian Health Project  
Bishop, CA  
760-873-8851 phone  
<http://www.toiyabe.us/>

*"The water fountain installed outside the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Reservation Tribal Gymnasium gives our community a healthy alternative for refreshment."*

**- Mel Joseph, Environmental Director Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Reservation**

## Sustainable Success

"Awa Paya-na A-hibi" is Paiute for "Drink lots of water." TIHP's long-term vision for this initiative is for every person in Inyo County to have access to water stations within five minutes walking distance of spaces where they live, work or play.

Each partner will ensure the sustainability of initiative by formally committing to the long-term maintenance and upkeep of the water stations they installed.

TIHP will continue to identify new or additional locations that need water bottle filling stations to increase access to healthy water. TIHP will also seek to promote the water bottle filling stations through media, including producing a map of locations. TIHP's water access initiative will ensure safe, clean water for years to come.

