

Increasing Awareness and Importance of Tobacco Prevention through Partnerships

by: Serena Johnson

SUMMARY

Toiyabe Indian Health Project (TIHP) Preventive Medicine and Behavior Health Departments came together with a common goal to learn about commercial tobacco cessation, train and support staff in offering cessation services, and utilize public health efforts to reduce smoking rates in our tribal communities.

Recognizing that the most successful cessation programs respect tribal culture, TIHP staff selected to include education on traditional tobacco as well.



CHALLENGE

Commercial tobacco use among American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) is disproportionate to other ethnic groups in the United States. In the 2014 Health Consequences of Smoking, the CDC reported that 26.1% of all AI/AN adults were cigarette smokers. While AI/AN make up a small number of California smokers, their smoking prevalence rate of 38.8% is extremely high, according to the California Tobacco Facts and Figures 2015 report by the California Department of Public Health.

Adequately screening and referring patients to a cessation option is a challenge. From a 2014 GPRA report, 52% of TIHP patients were screened for tobacco use, with 29.2% AI/AN patients using commercial tobacco. This high prevalence of commercial tobacco use in our tribal community puts one third of the population at risk for dying prematurely or suffering from at least one serious disease.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Smoking affects us all. It is important for all community members to learn about the difference between traditional tobacco use and commercial tobacco use. You can make a difference by organizing an event to promote awareness about tobacco use. When the community gets involved, lives are touched and progress is made.

"The Walk for Life (suicide awareness event) incorporated a traditional tobacco blessing and a walking stick with tobacco ties. The event was a great success with 124 participants. We will continue to include the tobacco blessing at the next walk."

- Carrie Jones

Contact

Serena Johnson

Toiyabe Indian Health Project

52 Tu Su Lane

Bishop, CA 93514

760-873-8851 phone

<http://www.toiyabe.us/>

SOLUTION

A delegation attended the National Tobacco Prevention Institute, hosted by the Healthy Native Communities Partnership. Staff from TIHP, California Rural Indian Health Board, and Northern California Indian Development Council met to translate new skills and knowledge into action by developing an action plan at the end of the Institute. This group identified the importance of easy access to cessation help as the primary need for TIHP patients. The solution was chosen from a list of policy, system and environmental changes presented by the CDC Office on Smoking and Health. A secondary focus to also focus on the education of traditional tobacco compared to commercial tobacco use was selected.

RESULTS

This systems change action plan continued to carry momentum after staff returned from the National Tobacco Prevention Institute. The group continues to meet once a month to review and take steps to increase access to cessation services at TIHP clinics. Plans to host an in-service training for staff and evaluate screening procedures are in progress.

With cross department collaboration, TIHP is emphasizing a new focus on traditional tobacco education. In their annual Walk for Life event to bring awareness and education on the subject of suicide in Indian Country, a traditional tobacco blessing was given before the walk started and the 124 participants were invited to do a tobacco blessing in a small portable fire pit. A walking staff equipped with tobacco ties for additional blessing on the walk was carried by two young participants.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The goal is to train and educate staff and the community in commercial tobacco cessation topics over the next two years. By focusing on training and educating staff on the cultural traditions of traditional tobacco and the harm of commercial tobacco, TIHP hopes to create an awareness and understanding around tobacco prevention issues. Through the funding TIHP received from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, they hope to adopt a smoke-free campus policy for all three clinic campuses.