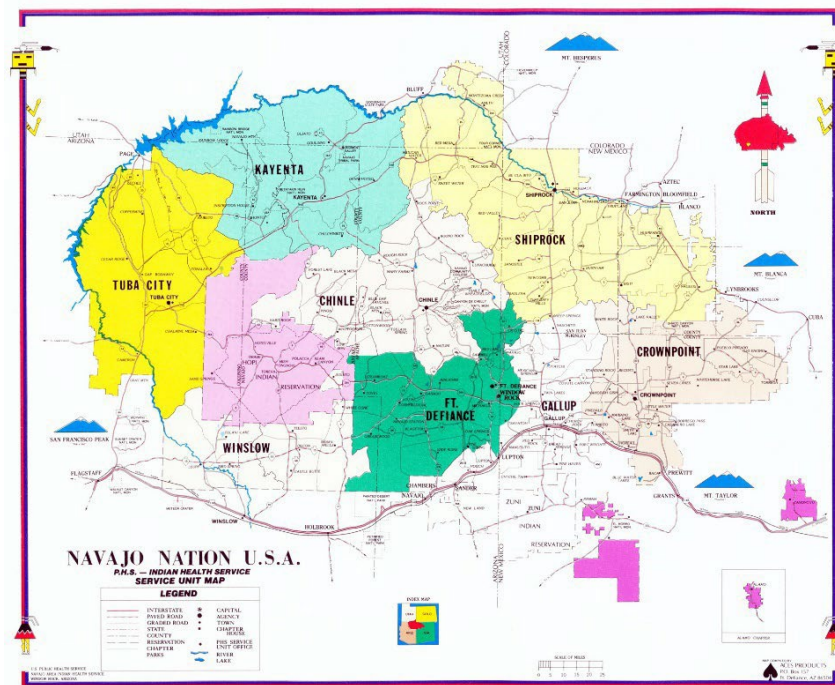




Navajo Area Indian Health Service Quarterly Report



25th Navajo Nation Council
Winter Session
January 2024

Navajo Area Indian Health Service
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January 22, 2024

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This report provides general Indian health information updates, and summarizes significant activities of the Navajo Area Indian Health Service (NAIHS) for the months October, November, and December of 2023. The NAIHS appreciates its relationships with the Navajo Nation and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe. We look forward to our continued partnership as we work together to improve the health status of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Navajo Area Office Administration

Navajo Area Office of Environment Health and Engineering (OEHE) Director position. Since 2019, CAPT Gordon Tsatoke has served on multiple temporary assignments while OEHE Director CAPT Brian Johnson, served as the Acting Deputy Area Director. CAPT Johnson is presently on another temporary assignment to IHS Headquarters (HQ) working on Sanitation Facilities Construction activities related to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This assignment will extend into calendar year 2024.

As CAPT Gordon Tsatoke returns to his position of record as the Deputy Director of the Division of Environmental Health Services (DEHS), I would like to thank him for serving as acting OEHE Director and providing direction during an unprecedented time in our Nation's history. His leadership was critical during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE), and his commitment to his work was exceptional.

As of November 6, 2023, CDR Kevin Gaines, MD, is serving as acting OEHE Director. CDR Gaines is also currently serving as the Navajo Area Chief Medical Officer. I want to extend my appreciation to Dr. Gaines for taking on this mission-critical role.

In addition, effective November 6, 2023, Dr. Zoann McKenzie has been detailed to the Navajo Area OEHE Director Office as an assistant to the acting Navajo Area OEHE Director.

Budget and Finance. For the first time, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Indian Health Service (IHS) budget included \$5.1 billion in advance appropriations for FY 2024. These appropriations provided FY 2024 funding for many components of IHS operations starting on October 1, 2023 even though the U.S. Congress has not yet passed a FY 2024 Omnibus appropriations bill. As a result, FY 2024 funds were immediately made available to federal, tribal, and urban programs at the start of the new FY. The benefits of advance appropriations are many. Federal service units were able to procure necessary services and supplies to continue direct patient care. Most staff have been able to continue working assured that any potential government shutdown will not impact day-to-day IHS operations. Navajo Area federal locations were able to plan more effectively, knowing that funds were immediately available.

It is important to note that advance appropriations did not include all IHS funds. For example, funding for the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) was not included. Therefore, only partial funding was approved based on a continuing resolution percentage. Partial funding may affect payroll for SDPI service unit staff who provide community outreach and health education. The Navajo Area Office SDPI Project Coordinator and Area Diabetes Consultant are aware of the partial funding and are coordinating bi-weekly meetings with service units.

FY 2026 Navajo Area Budget Formulation. The Navajo Area held the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Area Budget Formulation Meeting was held on November 28-29, 2023 at the Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort. The budget consultation was attended by representatives from IHS, Navajo Nation, San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, Native American Community Action, Inc, and Tribal Health Organizations. Participants provided information and recommendations on funding needs to continue or enhance

facilities and services. Thirteen budget priorities and twelve hot issues were identified. The budget priorities and hot issues will be presented at the IHS National Budget formulation meeting in February 14-15, 2024 in Washington D.C.

Navajo Area Office – Office of Clinical Services

Physician Leaders Training. One of the major requests from NAIHS physicians has been for leadership training. As physicians progress from their university degree to medical school and then to residency, they remain focused on providing excellent medical care to patients. However, when they are eventually asked to take on a leadership role, it is likely they never received formal training. This can create a lot of anxiety, as they encounter situations for which they have often not been prepared for. To address this training gap, we have created a Physician Leadership Curriculum Development Team that has developed training designed for our physician leaders. More than 20 Navajo Area physician leaders attended the initial training held on October 30, 2023. We have collected feedback from this training to improve and expand with future trainings to be held in 2024.



Chinle Airport Upgrade Project. On December 13, 2023, the Navajo Area Director and Navajo Area Chief Medical Officer attended a pre-construction meeting for the Chinle Airport Upgrade Project at the chapter house in Chinle, AZ. This meeting was attended by representatives from the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, the Navajo Nation Department of Transportation, the Navajo Department of Health, Chinle Comprehensive Health Care Center, and the contractors implementing the upgrades. This project will provide timely access to patient transports when patients require a higher level of care than local resources can provide.

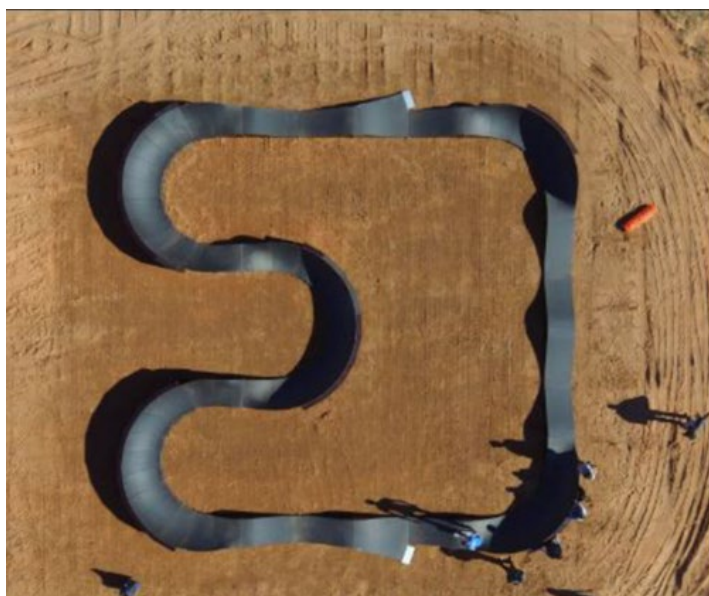
Navajo Area Office – Office of Public Health

Syphilis Surveillance and Response. The Navajo Area has seen an increase in the number of syphilis cases. The Navajo Area Public Health Division is working with federal service units to develop an area-wide framework for conducting surveillance and evaluating response efforts. Developing a formal surveillance system has proven challenging due to the clinical expertise required to distinguish primary, secondary, and latent syphilis cases. Utilizing methodology utilized by Mississippi Department of Health, preliminary

congenital syphilis numbers were identified from iCare through selection of specific ICD codes. As a result, a bi-weekly Public Health Nursing call has been established. Priorities moving forward include improving coordination of case management between sites, and discussing how NAIHS can increase support to sites utilizing our Public Health Aide Team. Collaboration continues with IHS HQ to improve testing and treatment. The Dine' Bikeyah Health Communication Team, comprised of staff from the Navajo Nation Department of Health, P.L. 93-638 healthcare facilities, and IHS continue to work on consistent syphilis messaging to encourage testing, treatment, and prevention. These partnerships will strengthen our efforts to decrease the transmission of syphilis in our communities.

Dine Household Water Survey Project (partnership with Johns Hopkins University). Water access challenges are significant on the Navajo Nation. Current data on piped water networks is limited. The Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health team has collaborated with the Navajo Nation and Indian Health Service in a pilot project with the Fort Defiance Agency to capture qualitative and quantitative data related to water access. The project employs a household survey to ascertain water access experiences among residents of the Navajo Nation. The survey also includes water quality testing to those residents who consent. In December 2023, the initial phase of the project was completed with over 900 participants. In addition to survey and qualitative data evaluation, a GIS component was completed capturing the extent of homes randomly selected visited and surveyed, and homes captured with and without piped water. Preliminary review of the data has provided valuable information on participant demographics, household characteristics, and key water access data highlights. This survey will expand to other chapters across the Navajo Nation.

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Bike Pump Track Project. The Navajo Area Indian Health Service (NAIHS), Health Promotion Disease Prevention (HPDP) program has worked with 5 community partners over the last year to plan bike pump tracks on the Navajo Nation as part of an effort to build a safe environment for physical activity. Communities where the pump tracks will be located were identified through an assessment of current biking activity and partner readiness. The NAIHS was able to work with land committees and land lease partners to assure completion of the project. NAIHS HPDP has purchased bike pump tracks, and tracks are expected to be delivered in the communities of Crownpoint, Hard Rock, Kayenta, Nazlini, and Navajo/Redlake beginning January 8, 2024. This project is a great example of how Indian Health Service, Navajo Nation, and non-profit entities can come together to accomplish a common goal for the community.



Just Culture. NAIHS has been engaged in various activities related to Just Culture, which is a management philosophy that recognizes the importance of both individual accountability and organizational structures in preventing human error. Human error will occur, but Just Culture aims to create an opportunity to learn from mistakes and near misses, which in the end strengthens an organization. NAIHS has established a Just Culture workgroup that consists of the Navajo Area Quality team and various Service Unit Champions that review Just Culture teaching materials and selects the best concepts to be conveyed to NAIHS staff. Ultimately, educational materials will be posted within the HealthStream system for NAIHS staff to complete. PowerPoint slides will be available to Just Culture Champions to use at their service unit. Additionally, the Area Quality Team sponsored an in-person Just Culture training with 27 participants October 30- 31, 2023. The training covered a wide range of concepts including learning from mistakes to improve patient safety, creating a positive work environment, and embracing teamwork. Each participant that completed this course will have the opportunity to take an exam to become certified in Just Culture. Currently, there are 15 individuals who have passed the Just Culture exam and are certified to teach this course locally.

Root Cause Analysis. The Navajo Area Risk Management Coordinator participated in an HQ workgroup to create a standardized process for Root Cause Analysis (RCA). The workgroup is using new tools from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) RCA² training and incorporating RCA tools in the I-STAR incident report system. The workgroup is currently piloting the RCA tools at the Northern Navajo Medical Center.

Patient Safety. The Navajo Area Performance Improvement coordinator completed a Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety (TeamSTEPPS) training at Chinle Comprehensive Healthcare Facility October 17-18, 2023. Participants were engaged in the training and developed action items to implement TeamSTEPPS concepts, *Fig. 1*.



Fig. 1 TeamSTEPPS 2-day Training at Chinle

InterQual Contract. The Navajo Area Quality Team assisted on the InterQual software continuation by renewing the annual contract for Kayenta, Chinle and Crownpoint. Training services are also included in the contract for Service Unit employees. InterQual is a resource for the Utilization Review program to comply in medical necessity and documentation.

Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) Modules. The Navajo Area Quality Team sponsored 100 slots with the IHI open class modules for Navajo Area staff. The IHI open school modules provide basic knowledge related to improvement, patient safety, and leadership skills.

Kayenta Service Unit (KSU) Site Visit. Navajo Area Deputy Quality Manager and Performance Improvement Coordinator made a site visit to KSU on November 6, 2023 to assist in preparations for an upcoming Joint Commission Accreditation survey. The two individuals completed Emergency Department tracers and reviewed hospital policies related to medication administration and suicide assessments. Ms. Wanda Begay, KSU Chief Nurse Executive, participated in the tracers and policy reviews.

Joint Commission Assistance. The Navajo Area Quality team received information requests from federal service units related to Joint Commission policies, and assist with identifying and resolving issues concerning Quality standard implementations. The Navajo Area Quality team are confident their contributions have been well received and the team will continue to provide this type of support.

Navajo Area Office – Office of Tribal Partnership (OTP)

Title V Multi-Year Funding Agreements. The Indian Health Service, Tuba City Regional Health Corp., and Utah Navajo Health Systems, Inc. have successfully renegotiated the two programs' multi-year funding agreements (MYFA). The two new agreements have been updated and fully executed. Both MYFAs cover fiscal years 2024-2028.

Title I Annual Funding Agreement Negotiations. Title I annual funding agreements (AFAs) for the Navajo Health Foundation/Sage Memorial Hospital, Inc., Fort Defiance Indian Hospital Board, Inc., Navajo Nation Health Management Services, and the Navajo Treatment Center for Children and Their Families have been fully executed. Sage Memorial has opted to extend their Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) contract for an additional year to September 30, 2024. Successor ISDEAA Contract and AFA negotiations with the Navajo Nation Emergency Medical Service are ongoing.

Timely modification processing, Annual Funding Agreement (AFA) execution and Agency Lead Negotiator (ALN) certification submission. The Office of Tribal Partnership (OTP), continues to prioritize both prompt payment and timely execution of agreements with 638 contractors and compactors. Title I modifications are typically processed within 24 hours of funds certification issuance, and fiscal year 2024 Annual Funding Agreements were fully-executed prior to the end of FY 2023. OTP also submitted all FY 2024 ALN certifications to Headquarters for Title V compactors prior to the end of FY 2023. With the exception of Navajo Nation Emergency Medical Service, all contractors and compactors have received their full 2024 Secretarial advance appropriation funding.

The Urban Indian Organization activities. The Office of Tribal Partnership (OTP), in conjunction with the Division of Acquisitions, has worked to establish a new contract with Native Americans for Community Action (NACA), which is the Navajo Area's only Urban Indian Organization. NACA's contract is a new responsibility for OTP. Earlier this year, OTP organized the effort to conduct a mandatory in-person site visit at NACA in addition to other contract maintenance-related activities. In the coming weeks, IHS will conduct another site review with the goal of ensuring quality services for American Indians living in urban settings.

Emergency Medical Service Tribal Re-authorization.: During preparations for 2024 negotiations with the three Navajo Nation 638s, OTP identified that the Navajo Nation Emergency Medical Service's (EMS) Tribal Authorization was set to expire at the end of the calendar year. OTP informed EMS that they would need to seek reauthorization, and EMS worked with the relevant committees of the Navajo Nation Tribal Council to achieve re-authorization through calendar year 2029. Without tribal authorization, EMS is not able to contract with the Indian Health Service, and a lapse in authorization could lead to a lapse in vital services.

Sage Memorial Recruitment and Retention. In order to strengthen recruitment and retention (R&R) efforts, Sage Memorial has retained some R&R Headquarters shares with the Federal Government. OTP is now engaged in connecting Sage Memorial with the appropriate federal personnel, so that open positions can be posted on the USAJobs portal. In addition, OTP is working with Sage to request Commissioned Officers who would work at the facility through the use of Memorandum of Agreements (MOA).

[Navajo Area – Office of Environmental Health & Engineering \(OEHE\)](#)

Sanitation Facilities Construction

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Sanitation Projects. Thanks to the BIL, the Navajo Area Sanitation Facilities Construction (SFC) Program is receiving roughly \$120 million per year for water and sewer infrastructure projects. However, historic national shortages of licensed civil engineers and the retirement of seasoned staff have resulted in staffing gaps within the SFC program.

To address staffing issues, SFC will be hiring a cohort of remote engineers. Three remote licensed engineers have been already selected and are completing background/security clearances. These remote engineers will be helping SFC on project designs.

Additionally, moving into the next funding cycle, SFC will explore contracting and sub-contracting options to complete the work for all of our Districts. This approach has proven to reduce times from roughly 3 years to 13-14 months.

Finally, SFC is also partnering with the Army Corps of Engineers for several larger water main projects located in the communities of Wide Ruins, Many Mules, Goldwater, Paiute Mesa, Tall Mountain, and Rotten Bananas. The Wide Ruins pilot project design cost estimate is expected to be completed by April 2024.

The BIL provides funding for a record number of projects. 132 projects were funded in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 and 49 projects were funded in FY 2023. Summary construction stage status of the 132 projects funded in FY 2022 is as follows:

- 90 BIL projects are not complete with planning and design.
- 24 BIL projects have finished design.
- 9 BIL projects have finished construction documents and 2 have completed construction plans and specifications.
- 3 BIL projects have finished project award.
- 3 BIL projects have been given notices to proceed.
- 1 BIL project has started construction.

FY 2023 projects are awaiting Memorandum of Agreement signatures at the Nation (currently at the NTUA). FY 2024 projects have been identified for funding and a request for funding has been sent to IHS Headquarters.

Division of Facilities Planning and Engineering

Pueblo Pintado Health Care Center. The new Pueblo Pintado Health Care Center design was awarded on April 20, 2021 to the Health Facilities Group, LLC, from Wichita, Kansas. The Project design was completed on August 9, 2023. The Construction phase Request for Proposals is in the early stages and IHS anticipates review and award by August 2024. Health center construction is projected to be complete by August 2026.



The Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment (FFE) package was developed and completed September 15, 2023. The FFE will be procured by the Navajo Area IHS Division of Acquisitions.

The Staff Quarters Request for Contract is scheduled to be issued March 2024 with a Design-Build contract to be awarded by December 2024. Design of the Staff Quarters is anticipated to take six months from contract award followed by actual construction. The Staff Quarters are projected to be completed by September 2026, which is the same time that the Health Center is slated for completion.

The Land Withdrawal and Land Lease is currently in process with the assistance from the Pueblo Pintado Steering Committee. The Pueblo Pintado Health Center will require a land lease for three parcels. The parcels will house the Health Center, sewer lagoon, and offsite electrical distribution line to the Health Center. The Real Property team from the Navajo Area Division of Facilities Planning and Engineering and Division of Engineering Services will also work with the Navajo Nation Land departments and the Navajo Nation Resource Committee for review and approval.



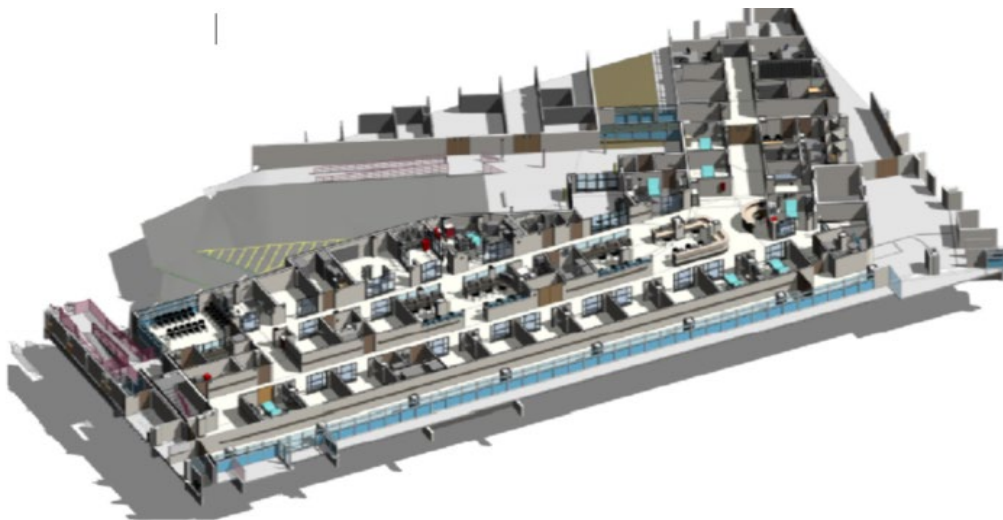
NAIHS has included the Pueblo Pintado Steering Committee and the Navajo Nation Department of Health in design development. The Pueblo Pintado Steering Committee includes members from the communities of Counselor, Whitehorse Lake, Torreon, Ojo Encino, and Pueblo Pintado.

Gallup Indian Medical Center (GIMC) Replacement Facility Site Selection. Phase II of the site selection process for the GIMC Replacement Facility is nearing completion. The date for completion has been extended from the August 31, 2023 to March 31, 2024 in order to incorporate new 500-year floodplain guidance from IHS HQ. Phase II of the site selection process involves an in-depth assessment of the Rehoboth site, including a legal land survey, flood plain analysis, soils reports, archaeological and historical data collection, and an environmental assessment. The Navajo Nation is highly interested in choosing a site that will support future expansion and economic development, and IHS continues to collaborate with the Navajo Nation to support future phases of the GIMC Replacement project. The Program of Requirements (POR) and the Program Justification Document (PJD) will be updated once a contract is awarded with the Headquarters (HQ) Planning contract. The scope of work (SOW) is in process and expected to be completed March 2024. The NAIHS and GIMC teams will be meeting during the coming months to discuss the new facility planning process.

GIMC Emergency Department Expansion. The Gallup Indian Medical Center (GIMC) Emergency Department Expansion and Renovation project design was awarded September 10, 2021. The project is being designed to incorporate the new Emergency Department Modular building to ensure both buildings operate together.

The project was out for solicitation three times, but did not receive a viable proposal. The project is currently on its fourth pre-solicitation which began on October 4, 2023. The construction contract is expected to be awarded by February 2024.

Project design includes renovating approximately 6,060 building gross square feet (BGSF) and the expansion of 2,282 BGSF of new space. The new ED will be approximately 8,342 BGSF. This new space will help alleviate the deficiencies with the ED, Observation Unit, and the Urgent Care Clinic. The renovation and expansion project will increase patient capacity and enhance patient care services.



Crownpoint Quarters. The Crownpoint South Quarters Repair-by-Replacement Design was awarded in August 2021. The current units were built in the 1950's and are beyond their useful life. The scope of work for this project is to complete a design for the replacement of 33 quarters units. Project design will include the evaluation of existing infrastructure, replacement of infrastructure, and a complete design package for the construction of 33 new quarters units. New quarters will be energy efficient and modernized. These new units will also help with recruitment and retention of staff for the Crownpoint Hospital. During the design process, the Service Unit collaborated with a local community group to make decisions on building aesthetics.

The project has reached the 100 percent Construction Documents milestone, and all funding at \$19,641,000 for the project is available. The project is currently out for bid, which closes on January 11, 2024. Construction award is anticipated by March 2024.



Tsaile Quarters. The Tsaile Quarters Project was selected to receive \$21,500,000 in non-recurring expense funds (NEF) to construct approximately 30 new quarters units and all required infrastructure. This project will aid in the recruitment and retention of health professionals for the Tsaile Health Center.

The Engineering Services project manager, Tom Plummer, is currently updating project planning documents to reflect the mixture of quarters to be built, which includes single-family homes, apartment buildings, and multiplex homes. The project cost is currently estimated to be \$28,917,969. While there was an initial shortfall of \$7,417,968 to complete the project, the Chinle Service Unit has agreed to fund the difference.

Kayenta and Inscription House Quarters. The Kayenta Alternative Rural Health Center and the Inscription House Health Center (IHHC) have been awarded \$8,200,000 to construct new staff quarters. NAIHS is in receipt of all funds, and a Request for Contract Action will be submitted for a design-build contract for the two quarters buildings. This project will support the recruitment and retention of health professionals for the Kayenta Service Unit. Project Managers from NAIHS have been assigned to manage this project alongside Kayenta and Inscription House leadership.

The IHHC project design package was submitted to the Division of Engineering Services on October 19, 2023. The anticipated award for the design phase is February 2024. The Kayenta Project scope of work (SOW) is in review process with the Kayenta Health Center.

Bodaway Gap Health Center (BGHC). The new BGHC and 92 Staff Quarters project design contract was awarded to the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation (TCRHCC) under a P.L. 93-638 Title V Construction Project Agreement (TVCPA) dated July 2022. IHS completed a design review on December 12, 2023, and the TVCPA has been modified to authorize the TCRHCC to complete the design and construction of the BGHC. Total construction funds for the BGHC in the amount of \$158,849,300 have now been allocated to TCRHCC. The TCRHCC is in the process of establishing a Land Lease Package with the Navajo Nation, and construction will begin once a Land Lease has been executed between the Navajo Nation and TCRHCC.

A pre-construction meeting was held on Monday, January 8, 2024 and the groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled for February 16, 2024. The BGHC is scheduled to be fully constructed by February 2026.



Chinle Service Unit (CSU)

Patient Transfer. The number of patients coming to CSU Emergency Department who require transfer is greater than it was before COVID-19. Since early 2021, regional hospitals have had markedly reduced capacity to accept transfers largely due to staffing shortages. Moreover, resources such as ambulances, helicopters, and airplanes are stretched thin. Regional coordination, timely and complete airport reconstruction, technology such as Automated Weather Operating System (AWOS) would allow safer air transport in more inclement weather conditions. Regional coordination of patient transfer and transport by acuity and severity would improve timeliness of transfer, patient safety, and staff comfort.

Tapestry of Wellness Harvest Celebration. CSU acknowledges the importance of showing staff appreciation and creating opportunities for social interaction among employees. CSU held its annual Tapestry of Wellness (TOW) Harvest celebration on the morning of October 26, 2023. Kim Russell, Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Department of Health, gave a keynote address and expressed heartfelt appreciation for the quality health care provided by CSU staff. Pinon, Rock Point and Rough Rock Community Schools and Tsaile Public School provided an hour of entertainment, performing traditional songs and dances. Approximately 336 staff participated virtually, and 206 attended in person. Staff completed a post-session evaluation, resulting in approximately 90% satisfaction of the event.

Public Meetings. One of CSU's strategic goals is to improve communication with our patients, families, and communities by holding quarterly virtual community stakeholder meetings. The CSU leadership team hosted the last session of 2023 on October 4. Approximately 17 tribal leaders and community members participated by listening to presentations from various departments. CSU will continue these quarterly sessions in 2024.



Childcare. A majority of staff at CSU are guests here on Navajo Nation, coming from other parts of the country and even other parts of the world. Many are parents of young children but have no access to childcare services or family members nearby to provide support. Access to childcare services is essential to recruitment and retention for healthcare workers who have children or who hope to have children after starting work here. The absence of childcare services significantly increases stress for staff who are already engaged in a very high-stress line of work. To address the deficiencies in childcare, employees work together to communicate with local contacts, put up flyers in community locations, and use available networks to try to find community members interested in providing childcare. Prior attempts to establish childcare services on or near CSU grounds have not been successful due to Tribal and Federal restrictions.

Fire Extinguisher Training. Pinon Health Center is a strong proponent of safety training programs. The Maintenance Department has purchased a fire extinguisher simulator system for training purposes. This essential training ensures our team is prepared to respond appropriately in the event of a fire.

Crownpoint Service Unit (CPSU)

Respiratory Illness. At the start of October 2023, the Crownpoint Service Unit (CPSU) saw its COVID-19 positivity rate rise above 40 percent. This triggered the re-implementation of universal mask wearing throughout the campus. CPSU also launched the updated COVID-19 booster, flu, and RSV vaccines to protect our community members, targeting the high-risk segments of the community. From October to December, the Crownpoint Public Health Nursing Department sponsored 15 community vaccine events, offering influenza and COVID vaccines to 1,645 patients. The events included six BIE schools in the service delivery areas of Standing Rock, Lake Valley, Pueblo Pintado, Baca, Mariano Lake, and Borrego Pass. CPSU encourages staff, patients, and visitors to continue the best practices of wearing masks and staying up-to-date on vaccinations.

Community Outreach. The Clinical and Public Health Divisions are working on plans to roll out community health visits to better respond to the health needs of the community. Health providers will be working in close collaboration with public health nurses and chapter house officials to develop a schedule for community outreach. The multidisciplinary team continues to address pre-natal care and chronic illnesses including hypertension, diabetes, obesity, end-stage renal diseases, and chronic liver disease.

Modular Fitness Center. The CPSU Division of Public Health, with support and assistance from the Gallup, Kayenta, Shiprock, and Chinle Service Units, purchased a \$4.3 million modular fitness unit using Special Diabetes Program for Indians grant funding. Groundbreaking for the new building took place on October 5, 2023 with the CPSU Hospital Executive staff, NAIHS staff, and the contractor for the project. Plans are currently being finalized for the 5,146 square foot building which will be arriving on site in January 2024. This wellness center will offer patients and staff access to workout equipment and machines. There will also be space to host cooking classes and other educational sessions.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month. October was Domestic Violence Awareness month. The CPSU Sexual Assault Response / Domestic Violence Team sponsored a virtual presentation on October 19, 2023 that featured Ms. Lisa Dimas, U.S. Attorney with the U.S. Attorney's Office located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. 55 community members and hospital staff participated in learning about the legal process of prosecuting crimes committed on the Navajo reservation, with a focus on criminal activity involving domestic violence and substance use.

Gallup Service Unit (GSU)

Emergency Department Expansion. On December 15, 2023, the Gallup Indian Medical Center hosted a dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony for the expanded Emergency Department. The expansion will improve patient flow and includes a state-of-the-art CT scanner for radiology services. Many GSU staff contributed to this project.



Physician of the Year Award. GSU would like to congratulate Dr. Maricruz Merino, who is the recipient of the 2023 Physician of the Year award presented by the New Mexico Chapter of the Society of Hospital Medicine. Dr. Merino was selected by her peers for her commitment to quality and equity. She has also led several mission-critical projects involving glycemic management, heart failure and access to sub-specialty care from the leading institutions in the United States.



Dr. Maricruz Merino, M.D., FACP

Advance Appropriations. At the beginning of October 2023, the Gallup Service Unit Financial Division received FY 2024 funds under the two-year advance appropriation. Receipt of the advance appropriations has prevented disruptions to salaries/benefits and fixed expenses for continued hospital operations.

Updated Cleaning Procedures. The GSU Environmental Department (EVS) is updating its daily cleaning procedures to incorporate ultraviolet-C (UVC) machines. This practice may be expanded to other NAIHS service units.

Geriatric Scholars Award. The Tohatchi Health Center would like to congratulate Dr. Kristine Cruz, who has received a Geriatric Scholars award. Through the research, Dr. Cruz will gain insights on how to improve Navajo elder care services. The scholars program is scheduled to be completed in May 2024.

Syphilis Case Management. The Gallup Service Unit Division of Public Health Nursing (PHN) is providing ongoing syphilis case management as a result of a significant increase in syphilis cases. Staff are making improvements with data quality and reporting standards, and the PHN department has contracted a Sexually Transmitted Infection control nurse. The goal is to have sustainable practices and defined workflows in place by the end of the calendar year.

Fitness Activities. The GSU Health Promotion and Disease Prevention/Community Wellness teams hosted a number of events for local communities to increase health and wellness. In November we held Turkey Trots, fun walks, Zumba/Aerobic exercise sessions, chair exercise, and health fairs.



Native American Heritage Month. In November, the GSU Health Promotion Department celebrated Native American Heritage Month with a number of educational and outreach activities. GSU Staff had the opportunity to display their beautiful traditional skirts and moccasins and to celebrate Native culture, tradition, history, and contributions from American Indians and Alaskan Natives. Heart Health Month, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and Diabetes Awareness Month were also recognized.



Navajo Wellness Model Conference. December 5-7, 2023, the Gallup Service Unit collaborated with the Navajo Area and multiple partners from other service units to host a 3-day Bee Iina doo Na'nitin Hane Conference in Fort Defiance, Arizona. The purpose of this conference was to provide training on the Navajo Wellness Model (NWM). 118 participants attended the conference with instructors presenting deep compassion and heartfelt teachings and wisdom from our elders on wellness.

New MRI Unit. The GSU Biomedical, Facilities, Radiology and Orthopedics departments have been collaborating on the installation of a new MRI unit at the Gallup Indian Medical Center. GSU is currently determining the layout of a room that has been selected for the installation of the MRI. Installation is expected to be completed by March 2024.

Kayenta Service Unit (KSU)

Services Expansion. KSU leadership has taken steps to fully open the inpatient unit. As of the writing of this report, the unit has admitted over 47 patients. The next step will be The Joint Commission certification in January followed by full hospital certification. In addition to inpatient services, KSU has started to lay the groundwork for a same-day surgical services, and there are ongoing discussions on bringing labor and delivery back to Kayenta so expecting mothers are not required to travel over an hour to deliver.

Inscription House Facility. Inscription House is one of the Navajo Area's older facilities and needs extensive work to be updated. With a growing local population, KSU leadership is currently assessing the feasibility of constructing a new facility. A new facility would include modern equipment, meet modern compliance requirements, and provide housing for staff. Ms. Plummer, Kayenta CEO, presented the proposal to request a new facility at the Inscription House Chapter House on December 11, 2023. Community response was favorable.

Pediatric Advance Life Support Training. Kayenta Nurse Instructors are now providing in-house Pediatric Advance Life Support (PALS) training to Nurses, Nurse Practitioners and ER staff. Two nurses received extensive training and examination at Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation and Tse'hootsoo'i Medical Center this year to become certified PALS instructors. In-house training capabilities will reduce travel costs related to training.

Fitness Activities. Activity Topic: The Kayenta Service Unit HPDP/School Health Program hosted the annual 2023 Virtual 5K and 10K Turkey Trot as part of the National Diabetes Prevention and Awareness initiative. In addition, a school-based Turkey Trot walking program was offered to local preK-8 schools within the Kayenta Service Area. ABC School, Navajo Nation Headstart, Dennehotso Boarding School, Kayenta Boarding School, Navajo Mountain Elementary School, Chilchinbeto Community School, Kayenta Elementary School, Shonto Dormitory, and Tse'bii'nidzigai Elementary School all participated in the school-based Turkey Trot program with 1,430 student participants.

Fiscal Year 2023 Financial Closeout. The KSU Finance department worked diligently to get all the necessary processes completed by the end-of-year deadline. Even with new implementation of e-invoicing, g-invoicing, and other new interfaces the Finance Team were able to close out. Finance staff received an email from headquarters finance for a job well done.

Shiprock Service Unit (SSU)

Northern Navajo Medical Center

The Shiprock Service Unit (SRSU) includes Northern Navajo Medical Center, Four Corners Regional Health Center, and Dziłth-Na-O-Dith-Hle Health Center and two health stations located in the communities of Sanostee and Toadlena/Two Grey Hills Chapters. SRSU has operated the health stations to extend medical service to community members in the southern portion of the SRSU. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the two health stations were closed. SRSU is preparing to reopen the Sanostee Health Station on January 18, 2024. SRSU is performing repairs, renovations, and improvements to the Sanostee Health Station building to begin offering patient care and services. At the time of this report, SRSU does not have plans to reopen the Toadlena/Two Grey Hills Health Station due to additional repairs that may be required.

The Northern Navajo Medical Center leadership is working in collaboration with the Navajo Area Office, Headquarters Office of Quality, and Joint Commission Resources (JCR) to make changes and improvements to several areas of the hospital's operation to take patient safety to the next level. JCR has sent and will send subject matter expert (SME) team members to evaluate the hospital facility, clinical services, quality processes, and leadership to determine areas of improvement. Goals are being designed to address recommendations made by JCR SMEs. Plans currently being worked on are Quality Assessment Performance, Infection Prevention Control, Water Management, and Risk Management. These plans are critical to sustaining the positive movement made thus far and are continuing. This is the beginning of a one-year collaboration to meet the IHS mission and goals to ensure comprehensive, culturally appropriate public health services are available and accessible to our American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Dziłth-Na-O-Dith-Hle Health Center (DZHC)

The Dziłth-Na-O-Dith-Hle Health Center (DZHC) is located in the community of Dziłth-Na-O-Dith-Hle, NM, approximately 30 miles south of Bloomfield, NM. DZHC serves the communities of the Huerfano and Nageezi Chapters. The shortage of physicians to serve in rural and underserved communities can be challenging for a community because it can delay quality clinical services. In September and October 2023, DZHC faced a provider shortage. To address the issue, the DZHC Executive Leadership Team (ELT) collaborated with the ELTs from Northern Navajo Medical Center, Four Corners Regional Health Center (FCRHC), Navajo Area Indian Health Service, and the IHS Headquarters for guidance and assistance. As a result, FCRHC assigned a provider to come to DZHC four days a week to provide patient care during October and November. To lessen gaps in clinical services, the DZHC ELT immediately implemented recruitment and retention strategies to find a candidate for the vacant provider position.

The Dziłth-Na-O-Dith-Hle Health Center (DZHC) has been diligently working on filling positions. One position that has been an asset to the DZHC is the Supervisory Engineer position, which was filled in September 2023. This position was vacant for nine months, leaving DZHC open to the deficiencies of the Life Safety and Healthcare Facilities Codes. The Supervisory Engineer used his expertise to identify deficiencies while using his Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) certification to eliminate existing deficiencies. The Supervisory Engineer, DZHC Executive Leadership Team, and Safety Officer

collaborated with internal and external stakeholders from the Navajo Area, Northern Navajo Medical Center, Local Chapter Houses, Local Church, and DZ Community School. The Supervisory Engineer enjoys the teamwork at DZHC and has brought a wealth of knowledge and expertise to ensure the DZHC meets The Joint Commission (TJC) standards while supporting the IHS Mission and Goals.

Four Corners Regional Health Center

The Four Corners Regional Health Center (FCRHC) is located in Red Mesa, Arizona, and serves the communities of Aneth, Cove, Mexican Water, Red Mesa, Red Valley, Sweetwater, and Teec Nos Pos Chapters. FCRHC provides family medicine, internal medicine, optometry, dental, pharmacy, radiology, physical therapy, laboratory, social services, case management, mental health, public health nursing, diabetes education, health promotion and disease prevention, and traditional medicine. The healthcare teams face challenges from individuals experiencing behavioral crises or emergencies that require law enforcement assistance. In a crisis, the concern is always the safety and health of the healthcare workers, patients, and visitors. In rural areas, the response time from law enforcement can be longer. The FCRHC Leadership Team took the initiative to facilitate a meeting with the Navajo Nation Police Department and the Red Mesa Unified School District to find a shared solution. As a start, meetings focused on the police response to calls and investigative reports. To continue positive discussion, the Commander of the Shiprock and Crownpoint Police Districts plans an in-person meeting on January 25, 2024. The ongoing meetings between FCRHC, Red Mesa Unified School District, and the NN Police will benefit the community.

As part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2010 initiative to increase access to comprehensive, effective, and affirming healthcare services for transgender communities, the Shiprock Service Unit offers Gender-Affirming Care Clinic for youth and adolescents. The Four Corners Regional Health Center Mental Health department provides comprehensive mental wellness, including Dine traditions and resource-linking services. The goal is to offer as much support as we can locally, understanding that gender-diverse youth and adolescents face significant health disparities, lack of immediate help, and are at increased risk for mental health issues, substance use, and suicide.

The Four Corners Regional Health Center Wound Care Nurse's scope of work expanded after completing a clinical rotation in Chinle. Appointments can be made for nail care for diabetic patients. Education is also available for patients and caregivers to learn how to clean and dress wounds and what to look for to prevent complications like infection.

The Four Corners Regional Health Center (FCRHC) collaborates with local schools and community programs to promote wellness and prevention. In November, the Health Promotion department partnered with Navajo YES (Youth Empowerment Services) for the “Bike to the Rock” Keep On Movin’ It event. There were over 130 participants despite the snow flurries. The Optometry staff provided eye health education at Teec Nos Pos Chapter. FCRHC generates collective interest and action by engaging community organizations to help build a Culture of Health.

Concluding Comments

The Navajo Area Indian Health Service remains committed in supporting the Navajo Nation and San Juan Southern Paiute tribal leaders in their efforts to address Indian Health policy issues, improve the health status of Native American beneficiaries, and development of healthy communities.

Please contact the Office of the Navajo Area IHS Director regarding additional information or questions.

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