



# REACHing to a Healthier Anishinaabe

2012

## Strengthening Connections, Healthier Community

Saginaw Chippewa Indian Community

### IMPROVING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY HEALTH

#### Summary

Members of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe (SCIT) are more likely than all adults in Michigan to have diabetes and two other major health risk factors, obesity and tobacco use. Through the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan (ITCM) REACH program, SCIT worked to support people in living healthy by improving connections between the tribal clinic and community prevention efforts, and by improving clinic systems. Over the course of ITCM REACH, the number of patients served by the SCIT clinic grew steadily and as of 2012 is pursuing accreditation to support further system improvements.

#### Challenge

Saginaw Chippewa Indian Community is home to approximately 3,300 tribal members, with about 200 square miles of land in central Michigan.

Diabetes within the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe is twice as common as it is for residents of Michigan as a whole. SCIT community members also have higher rates of obesity and commercial tobacco use.

#### FAST FACTS

22%

Adults in ITCM REACH tribal communities have ever been diagnosed with diabetes.

68%

Adults in ITCM REACH tribal communities are overweight or obese.

### SUCCESS STORY

Effectively addressing these risk factors through community health interventions will reduce stresses that chronic diseases place on the healthcare system, help to better manage community members' conditions, and help to prevent more people from getting these diseases in the future.

High rates of chronic disease stem from both current and historical societal factors. The physical environment may inhibit travel, lack resources, limit the availability of fresh and healthy foods, and constrain employment opportunities. Historical trauma has impacted many American Indian families and relationships in powerful and long-lasting ways, leading to a cascading effect of disadvantages.

#### Solution



Such deep-rooted challenges require comprehensive solutions. While individually-focused efforts, such as health education, support individual health, high-level strategies that reach more people by influencing organizations and the community-at-large are also needed in order to achieve lasting change.

SCIT pursued several key strategies through the ITCM REACH project to shape the community environment to support and promote health, including:

- Instituting clinic policies and procedures to automatically screen and refer patients to relevant resources during all health clinic visits.
- Increasing support for smoking cessation through the tribal clinic for people who want to quit smoking.
- Improving the food provided at meetings and community events.
- Allowing tribal employees to use accrued leave time to participate in on-site fitness activities and

increasing the availability of venues and opportunities for physical activity;

- Partnering with the tribal academy to provide school-based diabetes prevention education;

### Results

The ITCM REACH program has served hundreds of participants in the Saginaw Chippewa community over the course of five years in diverse settings throughout the tribal community, including the behavioral health department, health clinic, school, worksites, community gatherings, and Elder housing.

Individual, organizational, and environmental strategies helped SCIT to achieve improvements to help control and prevent diabetes and heart disease:

- There was an increase in the number of patients with access to high quality clinic services. More patients were assessed for weight each year than the last, and the number of people with chronic conditions and associated risk factors receiving care also grew.
- Relationships between clinical and community health sectors were built and enhanced partly through institution of regular meetings with and education for medical providers. These meetings served to promote formalized policies and procedures that initiate referral of clinic patients to the community preventive services provided by

programs like ITCM REACH that could benefit patients.

- By re-establishing the Healthy School Action Team and maintaining relationships with the Tribal Academy SCIT helped ensure the curriculum would include ongoing diabetes prevention education to students regardless of transitions of leadership.
- SCIT increased inter-departmental collaboration to better serve patients with chronic disease by providing Personal Action Toward Health chronic disease self-management program at a variety of settings for tribal employees and patients.

### Future Directions

In 2013, SCIT will apply for accreditation, further strengthening formalized procedures for clinical care and referrals. This will help to ensure that as the volume of patients grows, and as the number of patients with needs for chronic disease management increases, the quality of care provided is maintained.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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