

Michigan Tribal Food Access Collaborative

Our Approach

The Michigan Tribal Food Access Collaborative aims to improve nutrition and overall health among Native American children ages 3 through 11 residing within six federally-recognized tribal communities. From 2017-2019, the collaborative focused on assessing local food resources, strengthening community partnerships, increasing culturally appropriate nutrition education resources, and building capacity to conduct child nutrition and BMI screenings at six tribal health centers.



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Challenges We Face

Participating tribes identified a variety of barriers to obtaining healthy foods by completing their community food resource assessments. Common barriers for tribal members included grocery stores that stock healthy food being located far away from where tribal members live; lack of offering healthy foods at local convenience stores; tribal members not being aware of the resources available in their community to purchase or access healthy foods; and healthy foods being unaffordable. Lack of access to healthy foods can lead to nutrition deficits for children and poor diets in childhood that increase the likelihood of long term health problems throughout life, including obesity.



"The prescription program helps parents talk about their barriers with kids eating certain foods and what they've done to get their kids to eat healthier."

-Tribal Coordinator



One Solution

One of the many strategies used by 3 participating tribes led to the development of a Nutrition Prescription program. Each tribe tailored their program to their own community context and resources. For all of them, children and adults who were seen by providers at tribal health centers and met a list of health risk criteria were given a ‘healthy food prescription’. Prescriptions included nutrition education counseling (with the parents), resource materials, and depending on the tribe-either vouchers to obtain healthy food items at the tribal or local farmers’ market, a food store, or they received a CSA fruit or veggie box of locally grown foods.

Our Results

From May 2017 through April 2019, a total of 410 individuals were provided vouchers or received boxes of nutritious, locally grown food through a tribal nutrition prescription program implemented by these tribes. Participants described the programs as helpful to parents who had barriers providing healthy food for their children, and as helping increase the number and types of healthy foods children would try to eat as part of their diet.

Looking into the Future

As the Michigan Tribal Food Access Collaborative moves into the future, the project hopes to:

- See the MTFAC Learning Community continue and expand to other tribal communities, local farms, and other organizations focusing their work on Food Access issues.
- Continue to work with Health Providers, Tribal Health Clinics, and others working with children to increase their knowledge of child/adolescent nutrition, increase staff capacity in the use of their Electronic Health Record and other resources that support work to reduce pediatric obesity
- Actively engage local convenient stores most used by target families to provide healthy food options, including fresh fruits and vegetables. Many store owners/managers reported an interest but wanted more information about how to display, package and store fresh items so they can be sold before the items expire.
- Seek additional funding to support implementation and conduct assessment around specific types of community interventions and provide support for nutrition prescription programs, include the different types of delivery, what type of education supports the effectiveness of the intervention, the sort and long term impact on children/families, and the potential economic impact on an organization, families, and community