

# New Mexico

## **Building Tribal Communities' Capacity to Raise Awareness About Cancer, Improve Screening Behaviors, and Establish Lasting Partnerships**

### **Public Health Problem**

All types of cancer are on the rise among Native Americans, recent studies show, and Native Americans have the poorest cancer survival rates of any group in the United States. One critical public health problem facing tribes is Native American women's lack of sufficient knowledge about breast and cervical cancer screening practices, including the age when a woman should begin having mammograms and Pap tests and how often these screening tests should be performed.

### **Program Example**

The Albuquerque Area Indian Health Board has launched a culturally appropriate pilot plan to build capacity in a tribal community. By building public health capacity within the community, the board aims to reduce health disparities by improving health outcomes for Native American women with breast or cervical cancer. Additional goals are to enhance the capacity of tribes to conduct cancer surveillance activities, collect and analyze cancer data, identify health concerns and disease trends, evaluate cancer programs, and work effectively with researchers and outside organizations. The project will achieve these goals by building relationships, building skills, promoting interdependence, and promoting sustainability. For example, a culturally appropriate curriculum for training to improve public health skills has been developed and delivered to members of seven Southwestern Tribes. Additionally, a comprehensive public health needs assessment has been completed in the pilot tribal community. The results of this assessment have been used as part of a strategic planning process to bolster the local public health infrastructure to respond to pressing health issues. Interdependent partnerships between tribes and relevant public health entities have also been established. In addition, a health promotion video specific to the pilot community is being developed to raise people's awareness about breast and cervical cancer.

### **Implications and Impact**

This project is developing and conducting tribal-specific preventive interventions that aim to raise Native Americans' awareness about cancer and improve screening behaviors. The project aims to boost the tribe's capacity to gather and apply cancer data and create a model for developing public health capacity within tribes. The project is also working to establish sustainable networks and partnerships within tribal communities as well as between tribes and relevant outside programs.