

## CASE STUDY 2

# Primary Care / Rural Health: Meeting Tribal Communities Where They Are

# The Fort Defiance Indian Hospital Board's Mobile Health Program

(FORMERLY TSÉHOOTSOÓÍ MEDICAL CENTER)

## The Problem:

For many members of the Navajo Nation, seeing a doctor can require hours of travel, often on poor roads without reliable transportation. Many homes are in remote areas, making healthcare an all-day commitment. Indian Health Service (IHS) clinics are typically underfunded and overwhelmed, resulting in long wait times and limits on specialty care. Because of this, and other systemic barriers to care, chronic illnesses like diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease are often not treated early, and life expectancy for American Indians and Alaska Natives remains 6.5 years below the national average.\*

## Barriers to Health:

- !**Distance:** Many residents must drive hours on unpaved roads for a simple check-up or prescription refill.
- !**Limited transportation:** Public transit options are scarce, making travel to care challenging.
- !**Distrust and cultural disconnection:** Historic trauma and experiences of discrimination in mainstream healthcare settings lead some to avoid care.
- !**Financial limitations:** Not all services are free and navigating health insurance paperwork is especially tough for elders or those without literacy resources.

## The Mobile Solution:

The Fort Defiance Indian Hospital Board's Mobile Health Program brings primary and preventive care directly to people across 16 chapters in Arizona and New Mexico. Staffed by a Family Nurse Practitioner or Physician Assistant and Certified Medical Assistant, the mobile unit meets patients in familiar spaces such as homes, chapter houses, and community events.

## Services include:

- ✓ **Primary Care:** check-ups, physicals, chronic disease management, minor illness treatment, and preventive care
- ✓ **Culturally Responsive Specialized Care:** diabetes management, HIV/STI testing, mental health support, and health education rooted in both traditional and modern approaches

The program integrates Indigenous and Western medicine, honors Diné traditional values, and tailors care to Tribal community needs.

**When healthcare goes the extra mile to meet rural Indigenous communities where they are, the results are powerful:**

**MORE LIVES SAVED,  
FEWER ER VISITS,  
STRONGER TRUST, AND  
HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES.**

**The Mobile Health Program is a blueprint for overcoming deep-rooted health disparities with respect, innovation, and hope.**

\* Bor et al. 2025. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40522635/>



“ Providing care in the communities has expanded access in some of our more remote communities or just provided an alternative for an urgent need without burdening the ED.

— Vickie Cranford-Lonquich,  
PA-C, MS, Director  
Mobile Health  
Program

## Mobile Health Program's Impact:



**167**  
life-years  
saved\*



**\$12M**  
dollars  
returned\*



**\$11 return**  
per  
**\$1 invested\***



**867**  
ED visits  
avoided\*



**Brings care**  
to remote  
communities



**Builds**  
lasting trust  
with patients  
through  
consistent presence



**Improves**  
management of  
chronic conditions  
and preventive care  
adherence



**Empowers**  
families  
to engage  
actively  
in their health

\* Data Mobile Health Map's Impact Tracker