

CASE STUDY 2

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

The Fort Defiance Indian Hospital Board's Mobile Health Program

(FORMERLY TSÉHOOTSOÓ 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