



OCTOBER 11TH, 2025

THE INCATS TRIBAL ACADEMIC PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP (TAPP) SUMMIT REPORT

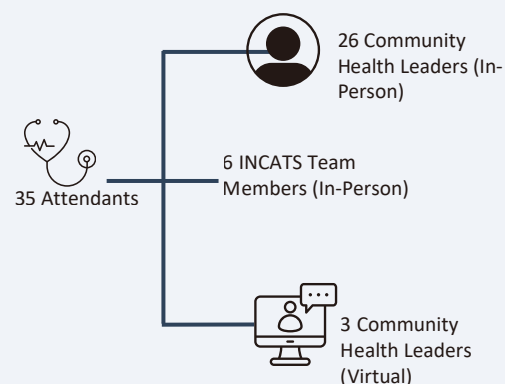
On October 11th, 2025, the INCATS program hosted the third Tribal Academic Practice Partnership (TAPP) Summit, co-sponsored by the American Indian Health – Area Health Education Center (AIH-AHEC) and the Wassaja Carlos Montezuma Center for Native American Health. The theme, *“Sovereignty in Care: Strengthening the Native Nursing Workforce through Culturally Rooted Support Systems and Clinical Collaboration,”* highlights how critical tribal sovereignty and inter-organizational collaboration are in building and sustaining the Native nursing workforce.

The TAPP Summit convenes leaders from Tribal Nations, tribal and urban Indian health programs, academic institutions, and workforce development partners to identify workforce needs, share effective strategies, and develop coordinated approaches to support Native students and nurses across the career pathway. The summit also aims to strengthen clinical training opportunities and improve healthcare outcomes in Arizona Tribal communities.

REPRESENTATIVES FROM:

- Tohono O’odham Community College
- Fort Defiance Indian Health Board
- Northern Arizona University
- UCSF HEAL Initiative/iHEART
- San Carlos Apache Healthcare Corporation
- Pima Community College
- Crownpoint Healthcare Facility
- Tohono O’odham Nation Health Care

ATTENDANTS



Keynote speakers Dr. Adriann Begay and Dr. Cristina Rivera-Carpenter

TAPP SUMMIT EVALUATION RESULTS

(Evaluations recorded via Poll Everywhere)

WHAT PARTNERSHIPS, PROGRAMS, OR ACTIONS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA TAKE TO STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NURSING GRADUATES AND TRIBAL HEALTH SYSTEMS?

- Establish mentors and nursing students continued collaboration
- Train additional preceptors
- Mentorship training or “training the trainer” for mentors
- Increased rural clinical rotations
- More mentorship support for students and those mentoring them
- Connecting with other AZ state schools to expand collaboration
- Peer mentorship
- Invite more healthcare programs and schools



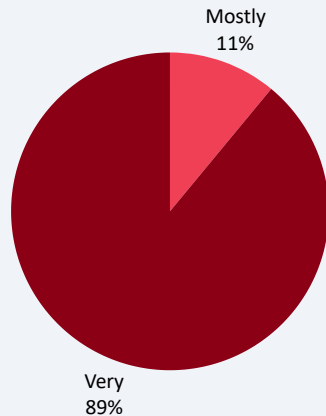
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

- Strengthening collaboration between nursing schools and Native tribes
- Grassroots nursing programs
- More Native American presenters or tribal presenters
- Consider inviting leaders or decision makers to help incorporate changes
- Continue building from this year’s discussion
- Cultural curriculum for nursing students to understand the background of their patients
- Invite additional Native American nurses to share their experience
- Continuing to share current new grad nurse mentorship opportunities



TAPP SUMMIT EVALUATION RESULTS

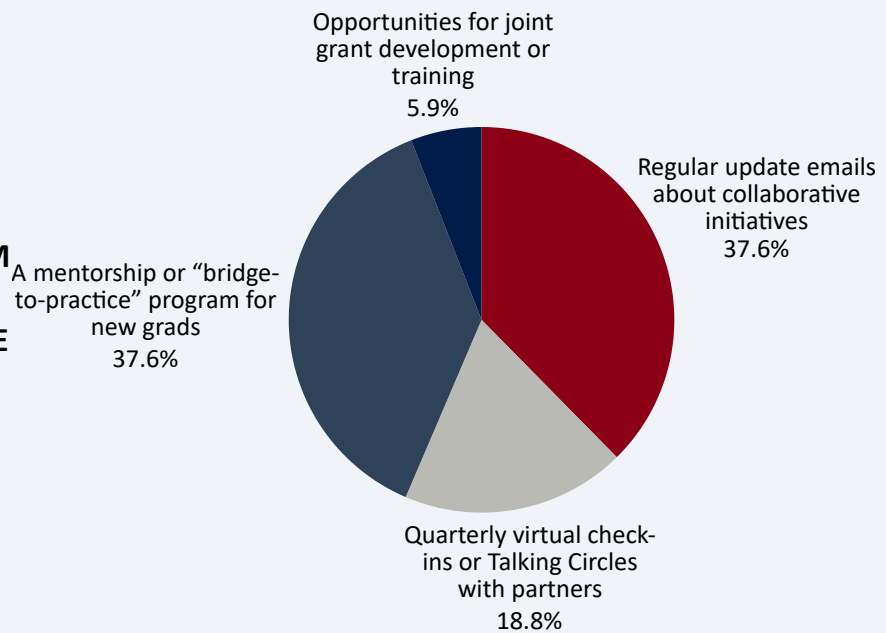
(Evaluations recorded via Poll Everywhere)



ENGAGEMENT LEVELS

100% of summit respondents reported being mostly or very engaged

WHAT FORMS OF FOLLOW-UP OR CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA WOULD BE MOST MEANINGFUL AFTER THIS SUMMIT?



WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE SUMMIT'S EXPERIENCES





INCATS Partner Presentations and Overview

The 2025 Tribal Academic Practice Partnership (TAPP) Summit opened with a land acknowledgment from Dr. Christina C. Bell Andrews, Executive Director of the Wassaja Carlos Center for Native American Health, followed by a morning blessing from traditional healer Miguel Flores. Dean Bryan Hyochol-Ahn of the University of Arizona College of Nursing, provided welcome remarks, recognizing the INCATS program as one of the College of Nursing's "most impactful programs," noting that, **"American Indian and Alaska Native nurses still constitute less than 1% of the overall nursing workforce in the United States...The INCATS program is one way we are changing that narrative—one nurse, one student, one community at a time."** Dean Hyochol-Ahn also affirmed the College of Nursing's strong commitment to the INCATS program and its long-term sustainability, including continued institutional support and plans to pursue future funding to ensure the program remains a lasting partnership with Tribal Nations.

The morning presentations included an overview of the Indigenous Nurses: Career and Transition Scholars (INCATS) Program, highlighting accomplishments from the past year, continued growth in student support services, and expanded collaboration with tribal and academic partners to strengthen pathways into nursing and advanced practice education.

Dr. Christina C. Bell Andrews presented on the work of the Wassaja Carlos Center for Native American Health, emphasizing the importance of "Grow Our Own" workforce development strategies. Updates included the continued success of the American Indians Into Health Professions (AIHP) program and the development of the TOCC–University of Arizona Bridge to Nursing Transfer Pathway Program, created in partnership with INCATS to support students transferring from Tohono O'odham Community College into the University of Arizona nursing program.

Mr. Jeffery Axtell, Director of the American Indian Health – Area Health Education Center (AIH-AHEC), shared program updates and described the creation of the Academic Pathways Program, which was developed in response to feedback from tribal and academic partners at the 2024 TAPP Summit. The program provides mentorship, career exploration, college preparation, and scholarship application support for Native students interested in healthcare careers, reflecting community-identified priorities discussed at prior summits.

Representatives from Northern Arizona University College of Nursing, including Dr. Neomie Tsosie and Dr. Suzanne McWilliams, presented on their Native nursing workforce initiatives supported through a Direct

Relief grant, including efforts to recruit, retain, and support Native nursing students through culturally responsive programming and expanded clinical training opportunities.

Student Panel

Our TAPP Summit attendants sat in community with four students and alumni from the University of Arizona College of Nursing. The panelists included Angela Acuna (Tohono O’odham, INCATS BSN alumni, Tohono O’odham Nation Healthcare), Jolynn Robbins (Diné, INCATS BSN Alumni, Tuba City Regional Healthcare), Brianna Hosteen (Diné, current INCATS BSN-Integrative Health student), Ariel Pereira, (Hia-Ced O’odham; enrolled member of the San Lucy District, Tohono O’odham Nation, pre-nursing student and Banner EMT). Panelists shared reflections on their educational journeys, offering insights into the barriers they encountered and the sources of support that sustained their persistence and success.

Central throughout the discussion was the **critical importance of community and mentorship**. As Brianna Hosteen shared, “The most important thing is having people who understand what you’re going through—and who have gone through it before.” Panelists emphasized that peer relationships and culturally grounded programs such as INCATS play a key role in reducing isolation and supporting student success. Angela Acuna reflected on her experience navigating nursing education with limited representation, sharing that she “felt alone the majority of the time,” and highlighting the importance of programs that create space for connection and belonging.

Students highlighted the significant impact of hidden financial and structural barriers within nursing education. They described the challenge of navigating unexpected expenses, noting “there are so many unknown costs—fees, supplies, even things like uniforms—that you don’t know before you start.” Panelists emphasized that these barriers are often magnified for Native and first-generation students and those supporting themselves or their families while in school, particularly when financial expectations are not clearly communicated early in their educational journey.

“There were only four or five of us [Native students] across cohorts. I felt alone the majority of the time. There was pressure from my family and everything on top of nursing school, and no one understood where I came from or the barriers I was facing. I felt alone most of the time. The INCATS program allowed me to find my voice.”

~Angela Acuna



Student-Informed Recommendations for Academic and Clinical Partners

The student panel offered actionable recommendations to better support Native nursing students across the education-to-workforce pathway. These insights highlight opportunities to reduce barriers, strengthen support systems, and improve retention.

Following the student panel, participants moved into a working lunch session focused on strengthening connections between academic programs and healthcare facilities. Conversation centered on improving hiring pathways, supporting new graduate nurses, and identifying ways to build stronger partnerships between tribal health programs and nursing schools.

For Clinical Partners

- Create supportive, mentorship-driven environments
- Foster a culture where students feel welcomed, supported, and encouraged
- Address harmful dynamics such as lack of engagement with students and prioritize mentorship, regular check-ins, and professional guidance
- Address bias and strengthen cultural humility
- Implement ongoing training to reduce implicit bias and microaggressions
- Ensure clinical environments incorporate understanding of Native history, culture, and community context, and support culturally appropriate practices
- Expand meaningful clinical experiences in Native communities
- Increase opportunities for students to train in tribal and community-based settings, with sufficient time and context to understand patient experiences and community needs
- Improve transparency and coordination
- Streamline onboarding requirements across sites and clearly communicate expectations, timelines, and associated costs to reduce unnecessary barriers

For Academic Partners

- Increase transparency and reduce financial barriers
- Clearly outline the full cost of nursing education—including fees, supplies, and clinical requirements—and expand access to scholarships, grants, and financial support
- Provide clear, structured pathways
- Offer step-by-step guidance for navigating nursing programs, including application, clinical preparation, and program completion, reducing confusion and decision fatigue
- Strengthen cohort models and mentorship
- Invest in cohort-based learning and connect students to consistent mentorship through programs such as INCATS and the Wassaja Center
- Expand academic, cultural, and professional support
- Provide accessible tutoring, culturally grounded spaces, and training in key skills such as self-advocacy, communication, and professional development

Priorities:

- Build systems of belonging and connection
- Students emphasized that success depends on community.
- Institutions and partners must intentionally create environments where Native students feel seen, supported, and connected throughout their journey.



HEAL Southwest Leadership Program Keynote Presentation

Dr. Adriann Begay and Dr. Cristina Rivera-Carpenter shared their personal journeys into healthcare leadership and discussed their work with the HEAL Southwest Leadership Program. Both speakers emphasized the transformative role of mentorship, community support, and culturally grounded leadership in helping Native healthcare professionals navigate educational and professional pathways.

Dr. Begay reflected on her nontraditional path to medicine as a parent and working professional. She highlighted the encouragement she received from nurses and mentors who recognized her potential before she recognized it herself. Dr. Rivera-Carpenter shared how her experiences as a new graduate nurse and her family's encounters with healthcare disparities inspired her commitment to Indigenous health. She described the HEAL Initiative as a program that helped her "find her voice" and provided the support needed to pursue her vision for improving Native health outcomes.

The presenters provided an overview of the HEAL Initiative, an interdisciplinary fellowship focused on health equity, leadership development, and long-term partnerships with underserved communities. Developed in response to concerns about "helicopter" and "parachute" approaches to global and Indigenous health, HEAL emphasizes working with communities rather than for communities, prioritizing local leadership, mentorship, and sustainable workforce development. Through partnerships in Tribal communities, including the Navajo Nation, Zuni Pueblo, and Pascua Yaqui Tribe, the program seeks to build healthcare systems that are rooted in community priorities and supported by local leaders.

They also highlighted the importance of mentorship, professional development, community building, and culturally grounded leadership in retaining Native healthcare professionals. Our speakers emphasized that creating a sustainable Native healthcare workforce requires not only recruiting students into health professions, but also supporting them throughout their careers through mentorship networks, leadership opportunities, and healthy workplace cultures.

"You can't sprint a marathon, but you can take small steps. The waves ripple out. That's how we'll transform the system." — Dr. Adriann Begay

The session concluded with a call to continue transforming healthcare systems through intentional relationship-building, leadership development, and what Dr. Begay described as "relentless incrementalism"—the belief that meaningful systems change occurs through consistent, sustained efforts that create lasting impact over time.

Key Takeaways

- Mentorship matters. Role models, community, and supportive professional networks help Native healthcare professionals thrive and remain connected to the communities they serve.
- Partnership matters. Lasting health equity is achieved through collaboration with communities, local leadership, and long-term investment rather than short-term interventions.
- Leadership matters. Strengthening the Native healthcare workforce requires culturally grounded leadership, healthy workplaces, and sustained commitment to systems change.

Closing and Next Steps

The 2025 Tribal Academic Practice Partnership Summit reinforced the importance of sustained collaboration between Tribal Nations, academic institutions, healthcare organizations, and workforce development partners to strengthen the Native nursing workforce through culturally rooted, sovereignty-centered approaches to education, mentorship, leadership development, and clinical training.

A common message emerged throughout the summit: Strengthening the Native nursing workforce is not just about increasing enrollment or producing more graduates. **It is about creating systems of support that allow Native students and professionals to thrive throughout their educational and professional journeys.**

The theme of this summit, *"Sovereignty in Care: Strengthening the Native Nursing Workforce through Culturally Rooted Support Systems and Clinical Collaboration"*, reflects the understanding that workforce development is an exercise in sovereignty. When Native students are supported in becoming nurses, advanced practice providers, educators, and healthcare leaders, Tribal communities strengthen their ability to define, deliver, and sustain healthcare that reflects their own values, cultures, and priorities.

The conversations throughout the day demonstrated a shared commitment to moving beyond isolated programs and toward a coordinated network of support. Through initiatives such as INCATS, the Wassaja Carlos Center for Native American Health, AIH-AHEC's Academic Pathways Program, the TOCC–University of Arizona Bridge to Nursing Transfer Pathway, and the HEAL Southwest Leadership Program, partners are collectively building pathways that support Native students from early career exploration through professional practice and leadership. While challenges remain—including workforce shortages, financial barriers, limited representation, and retention of healthcare professionals in Tribal communities—the TAPP Summit highlighted the strengths, resilience, and innovation already present throughout Arizona and Indian Country. Participants identified practical strategies to support Native students, strengthen mentorship, improve clinical partnerships, and create environments where Native healthcare professionals can flourish.

Objectives Moving Forward

- Continue the annual Tribal Academic Practice Partnership (TAPP) Summit to strengthen collaboration among Tribal, academic, and clinical partners
- Strengthen and improve pathways into nursing through initiatives such as the Tohono O’odham Community College (TOCC) –University of Arizona Bridge to Nursing Transfer Pathway, creating clear and supported routes from Tribal colleges into baccalaureate nursing education
- Increase mentorship, leadership development, and culturally grounded support systems for Native nursing students and healthcare professionals
- Strengthen partnerships between academic institutions and healthcare employers to improve clinical experiences, workforce readiness, and employment opportunities for Native nursing graduates
- Develop and share resources that increase transparency around educational pathways, financial aid opportunities, clinical requirements, and career advancement
- Advance sovereignty-centered approaches to nursing education and workforce development that support Tribal self-determination and community health priorities

Acknowledgements

The INCATS team extends its sincere gratitude to all Tribal leaders, healthcare professionals, educators, students, community partners, and organizations who contributed their time, expertise, and vision to the 2025 Tribal Academic Practice Partnership Summit.

We are especially grateful to our co-sponsors, the Wassaja Carlos Center for Native American Health and the American Indian Health–Area Health Education Center (AIH-AHEC), whose partnership helped make this gathering possible. We also thank the students and alumni who shared their personal experiences and insights throughout the summit. Their voices continue to guide our work and remind us that workforce development is ultimately about people, relationships, and communities.

The ideas, recommendations, and partnerships strengthened through this summit will continue to inform INCATS programming and our collective efforts to support Native nursing students, strengthen the healthcare workforce, and advance health sovereignty throughout Tribal communities. We look forward to continuing this work together and gathering again at the next Tribal Academic Practice Partnership Summit.



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