

Community Driven Innovation in Indian Country HEART Grants at Work

Background

The 2021 Montana Legislature passed House Bill 701, which included the creation of the Healing and Ending Addiction through Recovery and Treatment (HEART) Fund. This fund allocated \$500,000 per year for Tribal Governments for substance use disorder (SUD) prevention, mental health promotion, and crisis, treatment, and recovery services for mental health and SUD.

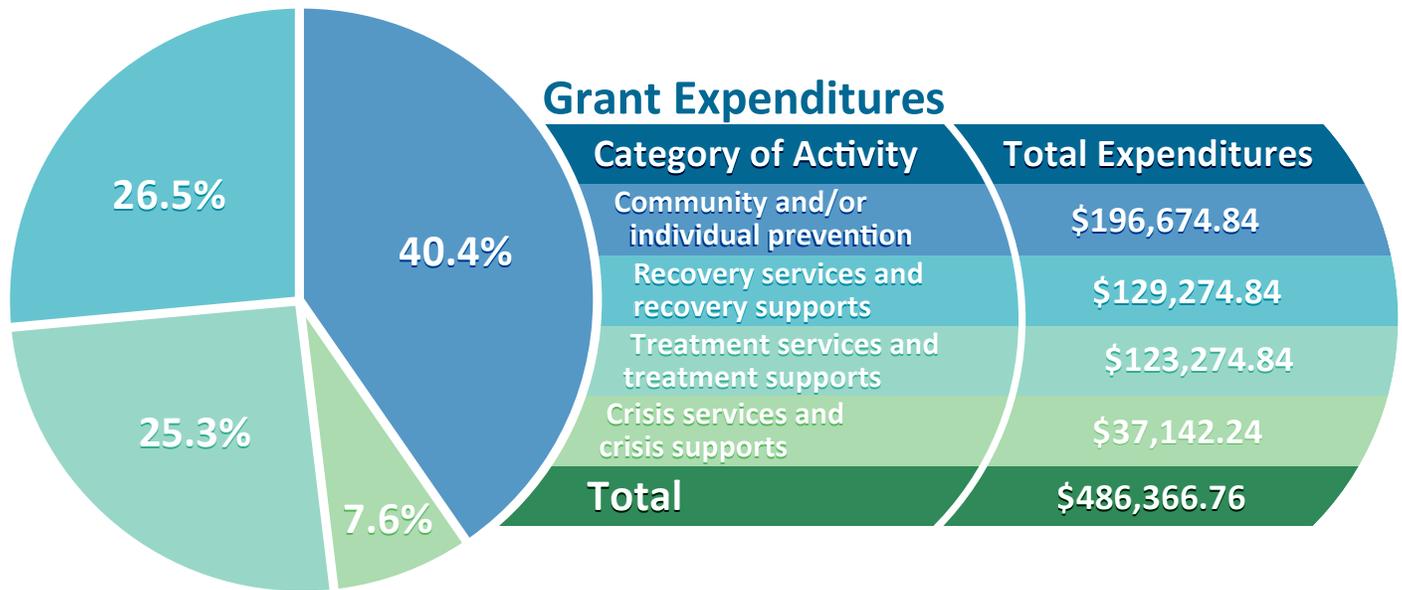
Each of the eight Tribes in Montana received \$62,500 in fiscal year 2022 for that purpose. This report represents the first HEART funding distribution. To date, each of Tribes have recieved a total of \$125,000 over SFY 22-23.

HEART Grant Principles

The grants were issued to Tribes with the purpose of filling existing gaps in prevention, crisis, treatment and recovery services. Tribes were not allowed to spend funds on services that are reimbursable though Medicaid, reimbursed through other contracts provided by DPHHS, or reimbursed through a federal grant. Reimbursable services are typically for direct medical treatment, which is important, critical, and life-saving. However, health includes much more than access to medical treatment.

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These grants recognize that having a safe place to live, access to nutritious foods, and connection to one's community are all important pillars for mental health and substance use disorder prevention. They are also rooted in the understanding that a sense of belonging and cultural connection are especially important for mental health and well-being. In communities with generations of trauma, reconnecting to cultural roots can help to overcome that trauma, foster collective well-being and strengthen personal identity.



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This funding fills numerous gaps as this report illustrates in the following pages.

Gap: *Funding for capturing, analyzing and utilizing tribally specific behavioral health data.*

Absences or gaps in tribal-specific health data make it difficult to impossible for a Tribe to assess the needs of its tribal members or efficacy of its programs. Assessing and tracking patients’ social, economic and environmental needs is critical to being able to fully understand and meet those needs, which the American Psychiatric Association identifies as important for improving mental health and reducing substance use. Research has repeatedly shown the influence these social determinants have on mental health outcomes, and calls for capturing this data in a systematic way in order to make it actionable for mental health improvement.

Filling this gap has improved communication among Tribal departments resulting in better, whole person care.

Gap Filled: The Little Shell Tribe, a newly federally recognized Tribe, has 6,387 enrolled members spread across Montana, the United States, and three foreign countries. The Little Shell Tribe are landless and do not have a reservation setting. The Tribe purchased a data management system so it now has the tools and infrastructure to assess, track, and help meet the behavioral health needs of its tribal members, as well as evaluate program effectiveness. With the collection and

of the information and data of its members, the Tribe will be able to efficiently identify the current social, economic and health-related gaps in order to develop programmatic interventions and solutions to improving mental and overall health that are collaborative, integrated, and centered on its members. With its case management framework, the system will also enhance its health department team's operational efficiency in providing optimal services and care to its members.

Filling this gap has improved communication among Tribal departments resulting in better, whole-person care and resource connection for its members, improving their mental and physical health and their lives. Filling this gap has also enabled the Tribe to collect data necessary for other funding opportunities to provide further care and resources for its members.

Gap: Funding for culturally appropriate activities to prevent substance use disorders and support SUD recovery.

The Fort Peck, Fort Belknap and Crow Tribes welcomed the new funding as an opportunity to supplement their provision of culturally appropriate activities to prevent SUD and support SUD recovery. Research shows that integrating cultural practices into SUD treatment can increase treatment engagement and success. A strong sense of cultural identity is a protective factor from suicide. Cultural traditions promote health and well-being, and evidence indicates that community-based and culturally grounded programs may be the most effective prevention strategy. As much of the trauma that contributes to substance use is intergenerational and community-wide, substance use prevention must be implemented at a community level, building on community strengths

and resources and integrating unique cultural practices, to be effective. The Tribes held a range of cultural activities and events designed to create healing, community connection and strengthen cultural identity.

Gap Filled: The Fort Peck Tribes created opportunities for tribal members to reconnect to their horse culture from the 2022 Horsemanship Clinic for Youth to the weekly Medicine Wheel self-help support groups. The funds supported youth leadership development through job opportunities at different horse culture events that provided youth the opportunity to try out different kinds of jobs while connecting them to their culture and community. They also supported those in recovery, bringing the Medicine Wheel group participants into the horse culture events and giving them both purpose and community connection.

Gap Filled: The Fort Belknap Tribes held a Sun Dance Ceremony and Youth Pow-Wow to support and strengthen community members' cultural ties. The sacred Sun Dance Ceremony brings people together for prayer and healing. The Youth Pow-Wow connected youth with elders and their cultural identity. These family-focused events had a strong message of healing and self-growth. Pow-Wows provide the ceremony needed for the community to face the trauma that has occurred, so that healing can begin for this and future generations. The Chemical Dependency Program staff facilitated the Pow-Wow to connect with youth and destigmatize the program and the services it delivers in the community.

Gap Filled: The Crow Tribe began a weekly cultural activities group, open to the public, to teach beadwork and cultural crafts. The funding allowed them to provide supplies for attendees. The group brings the broader community into the Apsáalooke Healing Center, destigmatizing it, and provides a drug and alcohol-free event.

Gap Filled: The Fort Belknap Tribes provided a class on the braiding of sweetgrass for community members to learn the practice of braiding sweetgrass and how it is used to improve overall wellness and mental health.

Gap: Funding for community-wide prevention events.

Strong community connections are an important factor in promoting mental well-being and preventing substance use and mental health disorders. Community events build those connections, and also provide an opportunity to raise awareness and educate the public about available behavioral health resources and supports.

Gap Filled: The Blackfeet Tribe held four community events, all of which included education and prevention and healthy messages. These included three runs – a Glow Fun Run, a Color Me Rad Run, and the Amskapi Piikani Health Run – each of which attracted hundreds of participants. The fourth community event, Youth Day, was part of the Blackfeet Recovery Days. More than 500 Youth Day participants received information about resources and behavioral health services available to them.

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Gap Filled: The Northern Cheyenne Tribe held a reservation wide community celebration, attended by more than 700 people. They displayed their mobile Behavioral Health Unit at the event, and providers handed out information about depression, mental illness, and suicide awareness, as well as answered questions from attendees. The Northern Cheyenne Recovery Program had booths at the event that also provided information about the types of services they offer. The event, which was widely requested to be held again in the future, included special guests and a meal for all attendees.

Gap: Funding for food as part of treatment and community events.

Food is a basic necessity, yet government funding and grants usually prohibit their funds from being utilized to purchase or provide it. This gap is especially salient as culturally, food is an offer of hospitality, part of building trust, and builder of community. In the food deserts of most reservations, providing food encourages people to join in activities, and when people’s nutritional needs are fulfilled, they are better able to engage and participate.

Gap Filled: The Crow and Fort Belknap Tribes provided nutritional snacks to clients in treatment and community members attending events. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe was able to provide a BBQ for all attendees of a community-wide event. The Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribes held group celebrations with meals for clients completing treatment. Additionally, the Crow Tribe replaced broken kitchen appliances at the Apsáalooke Healing Center so that they are able fully utilize the facility to cook and refrigerate food.

Gap: *Funding for sports activities and exercise equipment to encourage healthy activity.*

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Physical activity has many well-established benefits for mental health. Increasing physical activity directly contributes to improved mental health, brain health and cognitive function, a reduced risk of anxiety and depression, and improved sleep and overall quality of life. In addition, team sports have been associated with decreased commercial tobacco, drug, and alcohol use as well as decreased depression and anxiety.

Gap Filled: The Fort Belknap Tribes provided a three day youth basketball camp, based on a youth survey that identified it as an activity the youth wanted. In addition to providing a safe and desired activity for youth that brings all the health and mood benefits of exercise and community, participants reported the camp resulted in increased self-discipline and confidence. The Tribes additionally established exercise equipment loan programs in every community center and provided swimming passes to the local off-reservation pool. These passes were so popular that the pool had a record number of swimmers and people were turned away because it was at capacity.

Gap: *Individuals with substance use disorder often lack the basic necessities, such as personal hygiene items, clothes, laundry detergent, food and gas, needed for treatment to be successful.*

Decisions to enter treatment programs are often sudden, and clients often arrive with minimal, if any, resources for daily living. Clients often go to – and leave – both outpatient and inpatient/residential treatment and/or recovery facilities with only the clothes on their back. Clients are better able to engage in treatment when they have basic necessities for daily life.

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Gap Filled: The Chippewa Cree and Crow Tribes provided basic necessities to clients through care packages and incentive programs. For clients going into a treatment program, the Tribes created care packages with toiletries, clothing essentials, duffle bags, laundry baskets and snacks. Treatment providers noticed that the care packages helped individuals in treatment feel more confident and more at ease around other people. The duffle bags and laundry

baskets gave individuals a more dignified way to store and pack their belongings than disposable bags. These care packages not only met physical needs, they also conveyed a sense of worth to the individual receiving them, and a demonstration that their community cares about and supports them.

The Crow Tribe additionally created an incentive program, through which clients who attend outpatient group treatment earn points toward receiving weekly incentives, such as food, clothing, toiletries or gas. This both encourages clients to continue treatment and helps give them the tools to succeed.

Gap: Funding for substance use disorder treatment for tribal members not eligible for Medicaid.

Substance use disorder treatment is not readily available for tribal members in Indian Country. While two Tribes in Montana provide some components of residential SUD treatment, they, along with other Tribes, need to refer their clients off their respective reservation for treatment, and that can include referral to an out-of-state facility for a specific population. For those who lack health insurance coverage, whether private, Medicare or Medicaid, the referral is not accepted until funding is available to pay for treatment. This poses a very difficult challenge to get treatment in a timely manner.

Gap Filled: The Chippewa Cree Tribe used some of the grant funds to cover treatment costs for two people ineligible for Medicaid. By removing the barrier of the Tribe needing to come up with funding to cover the treatment costs, the grant made it possible for these individuals to get the needed treatment in a timely manner instead of having to wait until any potential tribal funds became available.

Gap Filled: The Blackfeet Tribe used their funds to pay for out-of-state residential SUD treatment at a Native American culturally-based facility for four adolescents who were Medicaid ineligible. Additionally, grant funds paid for airfare for one parent, as minor youth are required to be accompanied by a parent to receive treatment. Without the parent's ability to travel to the facility, the youth would not have been able to receive treatment.

Gap: Funding for culturally appropriate and integrated SUD and mental health treatment.

Evidence supports the benefit of traditional healing practices for American Indians with mental health or substance use disorders. Treatment has greater success when traditional healing techniques and ceremonies are incorporated. These can include adaptations to Western practices to incorporate Native values and worldviews as well as Tribe-specific practices and ceremonies. For example, sweat lodges are seen by many Tribes as vital for healing in the traditional way and connect tribal members to a higher power in a culturally relevant manner. They bring together the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of healing, and were provided in multiple communities as enhancements to the behavioral health services offered. Connection to one's culture has been found to be a powerful element of successful recovery.

Gap Filled: Crow, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, and Northern Cheyenne Tribes all used funding to add culturally appropriate traditional healing modalities to the treatment services they provide. These ranged from equine therapy to building and operating sweat lodges to learning the skill of setting up a tipi. Tribes reported that individuals who participate in these traditional healing methods increase their sense of belonging, cultural identity and connection to community, which empowers them against substance abuse, promotes healthy coping skills, and improves mental health.

Gap Filled: The Crow Tribe was able to build a sweat lodge for community use. The Fort Belknap Tribes were able to buy firewood to fuel the sweat lodges because without firewood, a sweat ceremony cannot take place. Northern Cheyenne's Recovery Center sponsored a Reservation-Wide Day of Prayer and Reservation-Wide Sweat, which invited all those who had sweat lodges to join in prayer for their youth and community to be free from addiction and to always maintain a healthy mind, heart and spirit. The funding enabled the Northern Cheyenne Tribe to pay for firewood and food for the participating sweat lodges.

Gap Filled: The Crow Tribe purchased a tipi, which they are teaching clients how to cut poles for and erect, while teaching clients its cultural significance. The tipi also has the dual benefit of creating an additional safe space for group treatment. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe purchased tools to take clients to harvest tipi poles. Clients cut down trees and peeled the poles, and were able to keep them for their future use. This supports their participation in traditional ceremonies, which is a cornerstone of their treatment and recovery program. Additional tipi poles were used to make tipis for families at funeral and wake services.

Gap Filled: The Fort Peck Tribes took steps to integrate their horse culture into treatment services, and also integrated Western behavioral health services into cultural events. They provided training to Spotted Bull Recovery Resource Center staff on how to integrate equine therapy into crisis intervention and treatment services. The Tribes also brought mental health professionals to the cultural events to connect attendees with supports, both professional and peer. The cultural events that this funding supported have led to community partnerships across different service organizations, supporting a holistic treatment and support approach that brings partners together to help individuals and families.

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Gap Filled: To help clients who have experienced trauma better be able to calm themselves, the Crow Tribe purchased materials for youth and adult clients to create toolkits for self-regulation. These materials included a combination of traditional ways and western methods, such as sage, cedar, traditional tea, beading supplies, fidget items, crayons and coloring books, and other art supplies.

Gap: Funding for treatment supplies and therapeutic tools.

Individuals with mental health and substance use disorders often experience overwhelming physical dysregulation and emotions. External tools can help them tolerate and manage these intense experiences.

Gap Filled: The Northern Cheyenne Tribe was able to purchase a variety of therapeutic tools for clients to use to help manage stress, emotions, and physical dysregulation. In addition, they purchased educational resource books that explain trauma and provide information about a variety of skills and techniques that can be used to manage its aftermath. They shared these books at community events.

Gap: Community support group for grief, loss and trauma.

American Indian communities have experienced extensive collective historical trauma and loss. The historical trauma response includes unresolved grief and profound bereavement resulting from these cumulative devastating losses. This intergenerational trauma causes emotional distress and puts individuals and communities at risk for mental health and substance use disorders. Interventions that place behavioral health symptoms in the context of collective historical trauma and responses to it have been found to alleviate some of those symptoms.

Gap Filled: The Blackfeet Tribe launched an indigenous-focused grief, loss, and trauma community support group to start the healing process for the Blackfeet Reservation. This pilot project includes presentations over a three-week period based on the Mending Broken Hearts curriculum, and group support in the manner participants choose. Participants will evaluate the curriculum, presenter, and outcomes of the group, which will guide changes to the future curriculum.

Gap: Services to help individuals maintain recovery and take their recovery to the next level.

Maintaining and sustaining recovery is a lengthy, ongoing process as people build new, meaningful lives for themselves. This often includes finding new employment.

Gap Filled: The Crow Tribe expanded their continuing care program by adding job application assistance for clients in recovery. They are also adding special incentive-based programming for successful recovery clients to receive extra case management and transportation to programs that will benefit them.

Gap: The inability to divert court-involved individuals whose primary offenses are substance use disorder or mental health related into strong mental health and substance use disorder treatment, with a focus on healing and recovery.

Research has found that standard courts fail to address individuals with drug and alcohol use who repeatedly cycle through the system. Drug courts, also known as Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts, provide the most comprehensive and effective control of the drug-using offender's criminal behavior and drug use. As alcohol or substance abuse are involved in more than 90 percent of the criminal cases in most tribal courts.

Tribal Healing Courts bring together alcohol and drug treatment, community healing resources, and the tribal justice process by using a team approach to achieve the physical and spiritual healing of the individual participant, and to promote the well-being of the community. Participants in these courts have lower rates of recidivism than non-participants.

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Gap Filled: The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes is in the midst of creating a Healing Court that promotes healing of CSKT individuals, families and community as a whole by directing court participants onto a healing journey, including mental health and substance use disorder recovery, instead of sending them to jail or other court options. This court will be trauma-informed, culturally safe, and promote recovery through a coordinated community-based response to an individual offender's dependence on alcohol and other drugs. Grant funds are being utilized to pay the Healing Court Coordinator's salary and support operations to bring this concept to fruition. The Healing Court is expected to be fully implemented by summer 2023.

DPHHS is committed and looks forward to partnering with the Tribes on this vital work in the years ahead.