



**SUCCESS
STORY**

Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium: Time Together Builds Dementia Awareness and Advocacy

Community:

Chistochina is a small, aging, Athabascan village in rural Alaska with about 100 full-time residents. Although it is on the road system, there is limited access to services since it is 236 miles from Anchorage. The grant recipient, the Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium, is a Tribal Health Organization that operates a Community Health Aide primary care clinic in Chistochina. Elders are the center of the community and want to safely stay in their homes and villages as they age. For this to be possible, it is important that signs and symptoms of dementia are identified early to support effective interventions. Before this grant, there was limited training for staff about brain health and less time available for health aides to spend with elders establishing a baseline understanding of their brain health. This grant was an opportunity to train staff on identifying early signs and symptoms of dementia and provide more time for staff to spend with their elders.

Grant Approach:

Knowing that timely interventions and treatment lead to a better quality of life, the Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium focused on training and supporting health aides in the community. They partnered with the Cheesh'na Tribal Council and the Community Health Aide/Practitioner

**Road Map for
Indian Country
Action #7:**
Educate healthcare
and aging services
professionals in Indian
Country about the
signs and symptoms
of dementia and about
caregiving for persons
with dementia.

Program to train Mt. Sanford staff, clinic and grant personnel, and interested community members. They also gave health aides more time with elders and supported their advocacy for the elders. The Cheesh'na Village Council President was a champion of the project, enabling greater community support and outreach.

Strategy 1 Provide training on early signs of brain health changes to encourage conversations with providers:

Training for staff, clinic, grant personnel, and community members centered on identifying early signs of dementia compared to normal aging and how to respond to needs of people with dementia. As a result of the training, when staff noticed changes, they notified clinicians to have a conversation with the patient and their families. When families noticed changes they were better able to identify medical concerns compared to normal aging, and could communicate their concerns to providers. Training on ways to respond to someone with Alzheimer's or other dementias who is scared or combative was especially helpful for Emergency Medical Service providers and other first responders.

Strategy 2 Ensure health aides have more time to spend with elders:

One sustainable change they made was to give health aides longer, more frequent home visits

with elders in the community. With more time spent together, health aides had a more holistic perspective on how the elders were managing their daily activities, nutrition, wood and water access, and safety concerns in their homes. Communication was easier in the comfort of the elders' homes than in a clinic when they were ill or after a long trip to see a provider. A strength for the community was that the staff and elders both enjoyed the extended time spent together.

Strategy 3

Train and support health aides in advocating for patients:

Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium also prioritized training for Community Health Aides to report, document, and advocate for their patients. Since health aides spend more time with patients, when changes happen, health aides may be more aware than the providers of underlying causes that need to be addressed. Their understanding and documentation of baseline health and concerns is valuable to providers who may consider presenting concerns to be just behavioral. The thorough communication with providers is important since providers may change positions frequently or may be located hundreds of miles away. The training and encouragement also helped empower health aides to advocate for extra support from family or providers when something was not normal for the person. Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium emphasized that the health care team includes people at all levels. For the safety of their elders, it was crucial that they all feel supported and equipped to advocate for their patients.

Looking forward:

Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium will continue to use the health aides as community champions for brain health. They will continue raising awareness, educating the community, and training clinic staff and families. They will also tailor the health aides' regional guidelines around early detection of dementia. To help reduce risk, they are also building connections with programs addressing diabetes, as diabetes is a known risk factor for developing dementia. By training community members and professionals, the elders served by the Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium receive more holistic, responsive, and appropriate care.



For more information on the public health response to Alzheimer's, visit alz.org/publichealth