

Advancing Maternal Health in Arizona's Tribal Communities

Turning maternal mortality review recommendations into community-led action

Every mother deserves safe and respectful care during pregnancy and after birth. Yet significant disparities in maternal health outcomes persist in Arizona's Tribal communities.

From 2016–2020, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people in Arizona faced the highest pregnancy-related mortality ratio (60.1 per 100,000 live births)—three times that of White, non-Hispanic individuals (20.0 per 100,000 live births), and nearly two times higher than all Arizonans (33.4 per 100,000 live births). Mental health conditions were the leading underlying cause of these deaths. Arizona's Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC) determined about 71% of AI/AN pregnancy-related deaths were preventable.

By translating findings from the MMRC into community-led interventions, Arizona is transforming data into actionable strategies that save lives and strengthen families. The MMRC and Maternal Health Innovation Program (MHIP) at the Arizona Department of Health Services are aligned to respond to critical maternal health challenges through community-centered programming.

A key focus of this collaboration is working with Tribal communities to identify and support community-defined solutions that reduce preventable maternal deaths and promote the health and well-being of AI/AN mothers and families.



Tribal Maternal Health Task Force (MHI Program)

Centers Indigenous leadership and community knowledge to guide maternal health efforts for AI/AN communities.

Established 2020.

MMRC AI/AN Subcommittee (MMR Program)

Reviews AI/AN maternal deaths and identifies prevention opportunities with community and provider input.

Established 2024.

The Tribal Maternal Health Task Force serves as a leadership body guiding programmatic priorities, while the AI/AN Subcommittee informs recommendations derived from case reviews— together ensuring data-driven, culturally responsive action.



From Recommendations to Action: Improving Maternal Care in Arizona

MMRC Recommendation

MHIP Action

Impact



FACILITY
PROTOCOLS

AIM Bundles - Arizona AIM Collaborative

All Arizona hospitals with OB services should use AIM patient safety bundles.



All four Arizona Tribal hospitals now use maternal safety bundles and work closely with the Arizona AIM Collaborative to improve care.



Better emergency response. Tribal facilities are better prepared to recognize and respond to obstetric emergencies.



WORKFORCE
EXPANSION

Indigenous Doula Training

Expand and diversify the maternal health workforce, including doulas.



More than 170 people completed the Indigenous Doula Training Program, and expanded AHCCCS-reimbursable doula services.



More culturally aligned birth support. Families have access to trained doulas who understand their culture, traditions, and community needs.



COMMUNITY
AWARENESS

Hear Her (Indigenous Lens)

Promote education to recognize warning signs during pregnancy and after birth.



The Indigenous-focused Hear Her campaign raises awareness in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.



Earlier recognition of warning signs. Families and providers are more likely to notice and act on symptoms that can lead to serious complications.



COMMUNITY
EDUCATION

Maternal & Family Wellness Training

Increase education for patients and families about prenatal care, screenings, risks, and resources.



Over 3,000 people attended Indigenous-centered Maternal & Family Wellness trainings.



Stronger health knowledge for families. More families have access to culturally centered birth education and wellness support.



POSTPARTUM
SUPPORT

Indigenous Breastfeeding Counselor Course

Increase access to community-based postpartum services.



More than 100 participants completed, and at least six earned the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant credential.



Stronger lactation support. Greater access to trusted breastfeeding guidance through one of the nation's strongest Indigenous lactation workforces.



PEER
SUPPORT

4th Trimester Indigenous Support Village

Establish community-based peer support across the perinatal period.



Nearly 300 parents connected with the 4th Trimester Indigenous Support Village.



Stronger postpartum support networks. Indigenous parents feel more connected, supported, and less alone after birth.

This page provides a snapshot of activities demonstrating how MMRC recommendations from 2020–2024 inform improvement efforts. It does not reflect the full scope of MMRC recommendations and MHIP work.

State-Tribal Partnerships in Action

The State Maternal Health Innovation Program (MHIP) partners with the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA) and Diné College, with support from the Navajo Nation Department of Health, to expand maternal health innovation activities across Arizona's 22 Tribes. Both programs are guided by community steering committees whose strategic plans include activities aligned with several recommendations from the Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC).

For example, in response to the MMRC's call to educate providers and community members on key maternal health topics, ITCA hosts [webinars](#) and Diné College produces the [Healthy Navajo K'é \(Families\) podcast](#). These efforts serve as important platforms for sharing maternal health information and resources with providers and communities.



Inaugural Arizona AI/AN MMRC Subcommittee Meeting, Phoenix, Arizona, 2025

Looking Ahead

- **Strengthen alignment** between the MMRC, MHIP, and Tribal priorities
- **Develop AI/AN-specific data products** to inform decision-making
- **Expand culturally relevant perinatal mental health training** (e.g., [PSI](#))
- **Collaborate with State and Tribal Maternal and Child Health epidemiologists** to monitor and report population health trends
- **Apply insights from the Title V MCH Needs Assessment and the ADHS Maternal Health Action Plan** to advance maternal health in Tribal communities
- **Build feedback loops** to ensure MMRC findings continually inform MHIP and community-level planning

Gratitude and Shared Commitment

We extend our deepest gratitude to the many partners working every day to improve maternal health in Tribal communities. Together, we advance this work by honoring Tribal sovereignty, uplifting community strengths, and supporting Tribally-defined solutions.

Each of us has a role in this effort, and your partnership helps ensure it remains successful, sustainable, and grounded in the voices and visions of Arizona's Tribal Nations.

Learn more or connect with us:

azdhs.gov/maternalhealth | maternalhealth@azdhs.gov