2026 CANCER SYMPOSIUM

TOGETHER FOR TOMORROW

Connecting on Cancer Prevention, Early Detection, and Survivorship across *Tribal Communities*

Presentation Information and Speaker Profiles

This symposium is presented by the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation (TCRHCC), Northern Arizona University (NAU) and University of Arizona (UA) Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP), Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity (C-NACHE), and Arizona Biomedical Research Centre (ABRC) and the Indian Health Service (IHS).

8:30–9:00 · Welcome and Blessing

MODERATOR LCDR Shawnell Damon



Darold Joseph, PhD
Associate Professor of Special Education, Director of the Institute for Native-serving Educators, Northern Arizona University

Dr. Darold H. Joseph is a citizen of the Hopi Tribe, representing the Paa-Is-wung-wa (Water Coyote Clan) from Moenkopi on his mother's side and the Nuva-wung-wa (Snow Clan) from Shungopavi on his father's side. He is an Associate Professor of Special Education and Director of the Institute for Native-serving Educators at Northern Arizona University. His work centers on the connections among health, well-being, education, and Indigenous knowledge, with a focus on reducing inequities through culturally grounded, community-driven approaches. Dr. Joseph is Principal Investigator of the My Health My Choice American Cancer Society Research Scholar Grant, which supports cancer prevention, screening, education, and informed decision-making among Native American women with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. He also serves as Co-Principal Investigator of Qöyungnuptu, an NSF-funded project using technology and cultural knowledge to support Hopi/Tewa youth well-being. He is committed to advancing equity and improving opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

9:00–9:30 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Opening Plenary

MODERATOR LCDR Shawnell Damon



Loretta Christensen, MD, MBA, MSJ, FACS
Chief Medical Officer, Indian Health Service

Dr. Loretta Christensen, MBA, MSJ, FACS, an enrolled member of the Navajo Tribe, serves as the chief medical officer of the Indian Health Service. The IHS, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the principal federal health care provider for American Indians and Alaska Natives. As the chief medical officer, Dr. Christensen is IHS' lead expert on medical and public health topics, giving technical consultation and guidance to the IHS Office of the Director and IHS staff throughout the country on American Indian and Alaska Native health care policies and issues. She provides national leadership for clinical and community-based health programs of the agency, and serves as the primary liaison and advocate for IHS health professionals.



Nicolette Teufel-Shone, PhD
Professor in the College of Health and Human Services, Associate Director of the Center for Health Equity Research, Northern Arizona University

Nicolette (Nicky) I. Teufel-Shone collaborates with Native Nations in Arizona to lead the American Cancer Society funded Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity. The Center's Advisory Board has representation from 13 Native Nations and 5 Native serving health organizations. Nicky also co-leads the Outreach and Engagement Core of the National Cancer Institute funded Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention, a partnership between Northern Arizona University, University of Arizona Cancer Center and Arizona Native Nations. For 35 years, she has worked with Native Nations to build local capacity and leverage socio-cultural assets to improve community health. She and tribal colleagues have maintained long-term partnerships to promote shifts in community norms to support changes in behaviors and health care to improve quality of life and reduce morbidity. As a professor at UA and now NAU, she has mentored more than 55 Indigenous graduate students, supporting Indigenous led health research and service.

9:30–10:15 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Panel Discussion - Building Native American Cancer Programs

SUMMARY This panel will explore strategies for building and sustaining cancer programs that serve Native American communities, highlighting the importance of trust, community-driven partnerships, coordinated care, and research aligned with tribal priorities to address gaps in services and improve cancer outcomes.

MODERATOR Dr. Julie Armin



Melissa Buffalo, MS
Chief Executive Officer,
American Indian Cancer Foundation

Melissa Buffalo is a citizen of the Meskwaki Nation and serves as CEO of the American Indian Cancer Foundation, a national non-profit dedicated to eliminating the cancer inequities faced by Native people. Melissa is deeply grounded with public health experience and shaped by personal loss to cancer. She leads national efforts to advance cancer prevention, early detection, treatment for Indigenous communities, centering culture, community, and healing across generations.



Dorothy Rhoades, MD
Director of the Native American Center for Cancer Health Excellence, Professor of Medicine, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

Dorothy A. Rhoades, MD, MPH, is dedicated to community-engaged research aimed at improving cancer outcomes in Native American communities. She earned her medical degree from the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine and a Master of Public Health in Epidemiology from the University of Washington School of Public Health. Dr. Rhoades is the inaugural Director of the Native American Center for Cancer Health Excellence and Professor of Medicine at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, where she practices hospital-based internal medicine and leads research focused on reducing cancer disparities among Native American populations. A member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, her work is grounded in bidirectional collaboration and respect for Tribal sovereignty. Her research focuses on cancer epidemiology, increasing access to cancer screening and prevention in Tribal health care settings, as well as improving cancer care coordination and access for Native American patients with cancer.



Monica Yellowhair, PhD
Assistant Director of Native American Partnerships, University of Arizona

Monica Yellowhair, PhD. (Diné), is Assistant Director of Native American Partnerships at The University of Arizona Cancer Center. She is of the Towering House people (Kinyaa'áanii), born for the Red House people (Kintichii'nii); her maternal grandfather is Manygoats (Tł'izílání), and her paternal grandfather is Reed People (Lók'aa' Díne'é). Her research reflects a commitment to critical health issues, including the effects of depleted uranium on DNA and increasing colorectal cancer screening among American Indians in Arizona. In her leadership role, Dr. Yellowhair works to empower tribal communities through strategic initiatives addressing cancer health disparities. She develops sustainable programs supporting cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivorship while ensuring initiatives respect tribal sovereignty, build trust, and respond to community-identified needs. Her work advances health equity and supports a healthier future for Native American communities in Arizona.

10:30–11:30 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Updates on Screenable Cancers

SUMMARY This presentation provides a Cancer 101 overview covering cancer development, risk factors, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship. It emphasizes prevention and early detection through healthy behaviors, vaccination, and recommended cancer screenings.

MODERATOR Taryn Watson



Monica Yellowhair, PhD
Assistant Director of Native American Partnerships, University of Arizona

Monica Yellowhair, PhD. (Diné), is Assistant Director of Native American Partnerships at The University of Arizona Cancer Center. She is of the Towering House people (Kinyaa'áanii), born for the Red House people (Kinłichii'nii); her maternal grandfather is Manygoats (Tł'izílání), and her paternal grandfather is Reed People (Lók'aa' Díne'é). Her research reflects a commitment to critical health issues, including the effects of depleted uranium on DNA and increasing colorectal cancer screening among American Indians in Arizona. In her leadership role, Dr. Yellowhair works to empower tribal communities through strategic initiatives addressing cancer health disparities. She develops sustainable programs supporting cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivorship while ensuring initiatives respect tribal sovereignty, build trust, and respond to community-identified needs. Her work advances health equity and supports a healthier future for Native American communities in Arizona.

11:30–12:00 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Finding Health Care App / IHS Updates

SUMMARY An overview of the Find Health Care Map App and Cancer Care Mapping project, including demonstrations of the collector and navigator apps. The session will highlight efforts to improve access to care and invite Indian Health Service, Tribal, and Urban sites to complete the cancer care assessment.

MODERATOR Taryn Watson



Loretta Christensen, MD, MBA, MSJ, FACS
Chief Medical Officer, Indian Health Service

Dr. Loretta Christensen, MBA, MSJ, FACS, an enrolled member of the Navajo Tribe, serves as the chief medical officer of the Indian Health Service. The IHS, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the principal federal health care provider for American Indians and Alaska Natives. As the chief medical officer, Dr. Christensen is IHS' lead expert on medical and public health topics, giving technical consultation and guidance to the IHS Office of the Director and IHS staff throughout the country on American Indian and Alaska Native health care policies and issues. She provides national leadership for clinical and community-based health programs of the agency, and serves as the primary liaison and advocate for IHS health professionals.



LCDR Shawnell Damon, DrPH, MPH, MSc
Senior Public Health Advisor, Indian Health Service

Shawnell Damon is the granddaughter of the late Molly Damon and Navajo Code Talker Anson Damon, Sr., and daughter of Lucinda Damon of Old Sawmill, Arizona. Born and raised on the Navajo Nation, she is Ashiihi, born for Bilagáana, with Tódích'íi'nii maternal grandfathers, and is the mother of two daughters. LCDR Damon holds degrees in Biology, Public Health, Cellular and Molecular Medicine, and a Doctor of Public Health from the University of Arizona. Her Indian Health Service leadership roles have included Health Promotion Disease Prevention Coordinator, Chief of Epidemiology for COVID-19, Acting Area Diabetes Coordinator, and Acting Public Health Director for the Navajo Area. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she co-led the unified response across the Navajo Nation, Tribal health programs, and IHS. She currently serves as a Senior Public Health Advisor at IHS Headquarters, supporting sustainable public health infrastructure, advisories, and community messaging across Indian Country.



Carlynne Worsham,
Geographer, Indian Health Service

Carlynne Worsham is an award-winning cartographer and certified Geographic Information Systems professional (GISP) with more than 15 years of experience advancing geospatial solutions across three continents. As the first geographer for the Indian Health Service (IHS), a role she has held since 2019, Lyndy leverages mapping and spatial analysis to support public health initiatives, healthcare operations, and informed decision-making across the agency. Based in the Office of Public Health Support (OPHS) at IHS Headquarters, she creates and manages geospatial data while designing custom print maps, interactive web maps, and web applications that support federal Indian health programs and help improve access to health services for American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

1:15–2:05 · 101A - 101C

Leveraging Community Engagement to Improve Cancer Outcomes on Navajo Nation

SUMMARY An overview of COPE and the Navajo Cancer Workgroup's efforts to improve cancer outcomes on Navajo Nation, including patient support programs and the Navajo Cancer Data Dashboard. The session will highlight how community input informs the Navajo Nation Cancer Control Plan and strengthens access to care.

MODERATOR Anna Knight



Hannah Sehn
Executive Director, Community Outreach and Patient Empowerment (COPE)

Hannah Sehn serves as the Executive Director for Community Outreach & Patient Empowerment (COPE), a 501c3 organization that works across Navajo Nation in close collaboration with local community members and partners including programs and health facilities. She has been working with COPE since inception sixteen years ago. Over the years she has worked across programs, including centering the voices of those with lived experience to guide program design, implementation, and evaluation. She has focused on leveraging diverse partnerships to promote healthy, empowered communities, and finding innovative ways to integrate the community voice including patients and family members and the work of community health workers (CHWs) into a community-driven approach to promote health equity and improve health outcomes.



Stacey Thompson, CCHW, MPH
Program Manager, Community Outreach and Patient Empowerment (COPE)

Stacey Thompson, CCHW, MPH, is Meadow People Clan (Haltsooi), born for The Towering House Clan (Kiyaa'áanii), her maternal grandfather is Salt People Clan ('Áshiihi), and her paternal grandfather is The Mexican Clan (Naakai Dine'é). She has worked in public health since 2014 and has experience working in local and Navajo governments as well as non-profit organizations to advance public health across a range of areas including substance use prevention and reduction efforts including training. She supported research to help understand the effects uranium has on childbirth and child outcomes including cancer related research. She currently serves as the Program Manager as part of the Community Outreach and Patient Empowerment Program, and is committed to bringing together patients, families, caregivers, and providers to explore how to better serve patients on the Navajo Nation to develop a system for support, advocacy, and empowerment.

1:15–2:05 · EARLY DETECTION · 102 A

Research Strategies to Address Helicobacter Pylori-Associated Stomach Cancer in Tribal Communities

SUMMARY This presentation examines stomach cancer disparities in American Indian and Alaska Native communities, with a focus on H. pylori infection among Navajo people. It highlights community-engaged research on infection prevalence, reinfection, treatment barriers, and prevention strategies to reduce stomach cancer risk.

MODERATOR Adeline June



Dornell Pete, PhD, MPH
Assistant Professor in the Epidemiology Department, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center

Dr. Dornell Pete is a tribal member of the Navajo Nation and an Assistant Professor in the Epidemiology Department at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle, WA. Dr. Pete uses community-engaged approaches to study the determinants of stomach cancer, such as lifestyle, environmental, and pathogenic factors (i.e., Helicobacter pylori infections and gut microbiome) in tribal communities to identify cancer prevention and intervention strategies to improve gastrointestinal health. Through the Navajo ABID (Stomach) Study (www.theabidstudy.com), Dr. Pete's research aims to be tribally based, led by tribal interests, and to support tribal sovereignty.

1:15–2:05 · PREVENTION · 102 B

Taking a Shot at Cancer Prevention: HPV, HBV, and the Power of Vaccination

SUMMARY This presentation will explore the role of human papillomavirus (HPV) and hepatitis B vaccination in cancer prevention, highlighting vaccine recommendations, safety and effectiveness, and strategies to increase vaccination rates and reduce cancer disparities in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

MODERATOR Dr. Braiden Eilers



CAPT Holly Van Lew, PharmD, BCPS, AAHIVP
Advanced Practice Pharmacist, Indian Health Service

Captain Holly Van Lew is an Advanced Practice Pharmacist in the Indian Health Service (IHS). She earned a Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona, in 2006. She subsequently completed a PGY-1 residency in Pharmacy Practice at Phoenix Indian Medical Center in Phoenix, Arizona. She is a Board Certified Pharmacotherapy Specialist (BCPS) and immunization subject matter expert, working as an immunization certificate program developer and trainer for over 10 years. CAPT Van Lew works at the local, regional, and national levels to educate pharmacists, providers, and nurses about immunizations with a focus on meeting patient vaccine needs at every encounter. She is also a subject matter expert in Syndemic work, addressing HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, and viral hepatitis. She is working at IHS Headquarters as an HIV/STI/HCV and Communicable Disease Pharmacy Consultant.

1:15–2:05 · SURVIVORSHIP · 102 C

Early Detection Rooted in Culture

SUMMARY This presentation will explore how culturally grounded, community-driven approaches can strengthen cancer screening and early detection in Native communities, highlighting American Indian Cancer Foundation programs and resources that build trust, improve access, and support patient navigation from screening through follow-up care.

MODERATOR Jennifer Hudson



Melissa Buffalo, MS
Chief Executive Officer, American Indian Cancer Foundation

Melissa Buffalo is a citizen of the Meskwaki Nation and serves as CEO of the American Indian Cancer Foundation, a national non-profit dedicated to eliminating the cancer inequities faced by Native people. Melissa is deeply grounded with public health experience and shaped by personal loss to cancer. She leads national efforts to advance cancer prevention, early detection, treatment for Indigenous communities, centering culture, community, and healing across generations.

1:15–2:05 · OTHER · 103 A

Walking the Path Together: A CHR and Research Team Partnership Adapting Care for Diabetes and Cancer Risk

SUMMARY This presentation highlights a Navajo community–university partnership adapting diabetes care to also reduce cancer risk. Guided by CHR leadership, Talking Circles, and Diné values, the program uses community input to shape culturally responsive education, family support, and prevention strategies.

MODERATOR Megan Russell



Timian Godfrey, DNP, FNP-BC, FAAN
Clinical Assistant Professor,
University of Arizona College of Nursing

Dr. Timian M. Godfrey, PhD[c], DNP, FNP-BC, FAAN, is a Navajo nurse practitioner, clinical faculty member, and PhD candidate at Arizona State University. As Co-Leader of the NACP Psychosocial Support Pilot, she partners with the LeChee Chapter of the Navajo Nation, Community Health Representatives, and a Community Advisory Committee to culturally adapt a diabetes self-management and social support intervention for American Indian adults living with type 2 diabetes and conditions with a high risk for cancer. Grounded in Diné values, including K'é, her work uses Talking Circles and community-based participatory methods to strengthen family and community support systems and improve chronic disease outcomes among Navajo adults and their families.



Sheila Hammer, MSW, LCSW
Associate Clinical Professor, Northern Arizona University

Sheila Hammer, MSW, LCSW received her Master of Social Work from the University of Southern California (USC) in 2009. She worked as an oncology social worker at City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center for nearly four years before becoming the Program Director for Cancer Support Community. She has been engaged with Cancer Support Community for over ten years, six as a working professional and four as a volunteer, serving on their Professional Advisory Board. She is an Associate Clinical Professor for Northern Arizona University's School of Social Work and is a PhD candidate in NAU's Interdisciplinary Health program. Sheila's developing research agenda focuses on cancer health equity for American Indians, with a particular interest in improving psychosocial oncology care. Sheila believes in culturally-responsive psychosocial care that honors each patient's unique experiences and meets them where they are; caring for the whole person, body, mind, and soul.



Roberta Lyons
Community Health Representative,
Navajo Nation CHR Program

Roberta Lyons is a dedicated public health professional currently serving as a CHR coordinator for a Liver Study in the Western Agency of the Navajo Nation through the NACP (NAU and UA). Her journey in public health began in July 2023 when her personal participation in the study inspired a shift toward a healthier lifestyle and a strong commitment to community service. Since joining the program as a coordinator in September 2025, she has focused her efforts on community outreach, health education, and promoting wellness.
Driven to advance her impact, she is pursuing graduate-level coursework to achieve a Master of Public Health program.

1:15–2:05 · OTHER · 103 B

Environmental Exposures from Legacy Mining as a Social Determinant of Health Linked to Kidney Cancer

SUMMARY This presentation examines how legacy uranium mining on the Navajo Nation may contribute to kidney cancer and other health risks. It highlights community-based research on environmental contamination to support prevention and future health care recommendations.

MODERATOR Dr. Emily Tahy-Ceballos



Jani Ingram, PhD
Regents' Professor, Northern Arizona University

Jani C. Ingram, PhD, is a Regents' Professor and Dr. Don Gilbert Endowed Chair in Chemistry at Northern Arizona University and a member of the Navajo Nation. Her research examines environmental contaminants and their health impacts in at-risk populations. She is the principal investigator of the Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention and works with a diverse group of students, including many Native American students. Before joining NAU in 2002, she was a staff scientist at Idaho National Laboratory. Dr. Ingram received the American Chemical Society Award for Encouraging Disadvantaged Students into Careers in the Chemical Sciences in 2018, the American Indian Science and Engineering Society Ely S. Parker Award in 2024, and the Distinguished Scientist Award from the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanic and Native Americans in Science in 2025.



Tasha Nez, MA
Senior Research Coordinator,
Center for Community Health and Engaged Research, Northern Arizona University

Tasha Nez is a Diné woman from Tónizhoni Valley in the Black Mesa region of the Navajo Nation. She is Áshįįhí (Salt People), born for Tó'áhaní (Near the Water People). She holds a B.S. in Environmental & Sustainability Studies with a minor in Biology and an M.S. in Environmental Science & Policy from Northern Arizona University. Tasha's work is driven by a commitment to environmental justice and health equity for Navajo communities impacted by cancer disparities. She believes meaningful research must honor Diné traditions, knowledge, and healing ways to build trust and create lasting change.

2:15–3:05 · EARLY DETECTION · 102 A

My Health, My Choice

SUMMARY This presentation will introduce My Health, My Choice, a culturally responsive program that supports breast and cervical cancer screening for Native American women with intellectual and developmental disabilities through accessible education, caregiver support, and informed health decisions.

MODERATOR DeeDee James



Julie Armin, PhD
Associate Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Arizona

Julie Armin PhD is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family & Community Medicine at the University of Arizona, co-lead of the Outreach and Engagement Core of the Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP), and affiliated faculty with the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities. As a non-Native researcher, she is passionate about partnering with communities and organizations to produce impactful evidence that facilitates improved healthcare, including accessible, inclusive cancer care that builds on the strengths of communities. She brings her training as a humanistic social scientist to inform qualitative, multi-method and community-based research approaches. She is co-leading the My Health My Choice project with Dr. Darold Joseph, which is funded by an American Cancer Society Research Scholar Grant through the Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity at Northern Arizona University.



Darold Joseph, PhD
Associate Professor of Special Education, Director of the Institute for Native-serving Educators, Northern Arizona University

Dr. Darold H. Joseph is a citizen of the Hopi Tribe, representing the Paa-Is-wung-wa (Water Coyote Clan) from Moenkopi on his mother's side and the Nuva-wung-wa (Snow Clan) from Shungopavi on his father's side. He is an Associate Professor of Special Education and Director of the Institute for Native-serving Educators at Northern Arizona University. His work centers on the connections among health, well-being, education, and Indigenous knowledge, with a focus on reducing inequities through culturally grounded, community-driven approaches. Dr. Joseph is Principal Investigator of the My Health My Choice American Cancer Society Research Scholar Grant, which supports cancer prevention, screening, education, and informed decision-making among Native American women with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. He also serves as Co-Principal Investigator of Qöyungnuptu, an NSF-funded project using technology and cultural knowledge to support Hopi/Tewa youth well-being. He is committed to advancing equity and improving opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

2:15–3:05 · PREVENTION · 102 B

Translating Liver Cancer Prevention into Practice

SUMMARY This presentation examines liver cancer disparities in American Indian communities, with a focus on MASLD and related risk factors. It highlights a Navajo Nation screening study and calls for early detection, family-based prevention, and community-centered care.

MODERATOR Anna Knight



David Garcia, PhD, FACSM
Associate Professor in the Zuckerman College of Public Health, Director of the Zuckerman Family Center for Prevention and Health Promotion, University of Arizona

David O. Garcia, PhD, FACSM, is an Associate Professor in the Zuckerman College of Public Health at the University of Arizona and Director of the Zuckerman Family Center for Prevention and Health Promotion. His research has focused on reducing obesity-related health disparities and, more recently, on metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) and related risk factors in Arizona communities. His work has received funding from the NIH and American Cancer Society. Dr. Garcia is also founder and director of Nosotros Comprometidos a Su Salud-Committed to Your Health, a community-engaged program advancing health equity through research, service, education, health information, and lifestyle interventions tailored for Mexican-origin and Indigenous communities. Through Nosotros, he has created research training opportunities for more than 100 students and helped ground research in trust and community relevance. More than 6,000 participants have taken part in his MASLD-focused research studies.



Priscilla Sanderson, PhD
Health Sciences Professor, Northern Arizona University

Priscilla R. Sanderson, PhD, MS, CRC, is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and a Professor in the Health Sciences Department, College of Health and Human Services, at Northern Arizona University. She earned her PhD from the University of Arizona, MS from Oklahoma State University, and BA from Southwestern College. Dr. Sanderson completed a postdoctoral fellowship with the Arizona Cancer Center and a Hampton Fellowship with the Spirit of EAGLES at Mayo Clinic. She has published peer-reviewed journal articles, two books, and book chapters, and teaches undergraduate public health and MPH courses while mentoring student research assistants. Her research uses community-based participatory research in partnership with local American Indian communities to improve quality of life. Her interests include cancer prevention and control, Helicobacter pylori, public health, vocational rehabilitation, independent living, resilience, nutrition, and tribal health evaluation activities.

2:15–3:05 · SURVIVORSHIP · 102 C

Delivering Comprehensive Cancer Care in the Community: Needs, Gaps, and Opportunities

SUMMARY This presentation highlights Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation's hybrid model for delivering community-based oncology care across a large rural Tribal service area. It also addresses barriers such as transportation, reimbursement, staffing, and limited local diagnostics while identifying opportunities to expand culturally aligned cancer care.

MODERATOR Jennifer Hudson



Tanya Riggs, MA
Oncology Services Program Director, Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation

T.J. Riggs is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. Her clans are Naakaii Dine'é (Mexican Navajo), born for Tábąąhí (Edgewater), with Táchii'nii (Red Streak Running Into Water) maternal grandparents and Tódích'íi'nii (Bitterwater) paternal grandparents. She lives in Teec Ya Kin, west of Tuba City, Arizona, with her husband and has four sons and two daughters-in-law. She holds degrees in administration/leadership and health sciences/community health from Northern Arizona University. With more than 25 years of healthcare experience, primarily in tribal health systems, she has led program development, strategic planning, operations, and quality improvement. Her work advances cancer prevention, screening, treatment, and survivorship services for Native populations, particularly patients in rural and geographically isolated communities. She advocates for culturally responsive care, health equity, sustainable oncology services, and partnerships among tribal communities, healthcare organizations, researchers, and policymakers to improve cancer outcomes across Native communities.

2:15–3:05 · OTHER · 103 A

Using Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Research

SUMMARY This presentation explores how uranium mining and environmental exposures on the Navajo Nation have affected land, water, culture, and health. It highlights contamination, cancer risks, health disparities, and efforts in environmental justice, remediation, and community-based research.

MODERATOR Megan Russell



Tommy Rock, PhD
Assistant Research Professor in School of Earth and Sustainability, Northern Arizona University

Tommy Rock is a member of the Navajo Nation from Monument Valley, Utah, and the first in his family to earn a doctoral degree. He holds degrees in Environmental Geography and Recreational Management, and Earth Science and Environmental Sustainability, including a Ph.D. from Northern Arizona University. His research experience includes work at the University of New Mexico, the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency, the University of Utah, and Princeton University. Dr. Rock has studied uranium dust, groundwater contamination, and air quality impacts associated with oil and gas development on the Navajo Nation. His work integrates environmental and cultural perspectives on the lasting effects of uranium mining. With family and community connections to areas affected by mining and cancer, he incorporates Navajo culture, Fundamental Laws, and traditional ecological knowledge into research and policy. He works with the Dine' Hataalii Association, supporting culturally grounded approaches to uranium contamination and community well-being.

Day 1 & Day 2 · OTHER · 103 B

Commercial Tobacco Cessation Strategies and Resources (Parts 1– 4)

SUMMARY This workshop will explore evidence-based strategies and practical resources to support commercial tobacco cessation. Participants will learn about effective approaches, available cessation tools and services, and ways to connect individuals and communities with culturally responsive support for becoming and staying tobacco-free.

MODERATOR Elfreida Barton



Paula Carter, PhD
Health Promotion Disease Prevention Area Coordinator, Indian Health Service

Dr. Carter joined the Billings Area Indian Health Service's Office of Healthcare Programs as a Health Systems Specialist in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention in October 2017. Prior to coming to the Billings Area Office, she was a health disparities researcher and directed the National Resource Center on Native American Aging at the School of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of North Dakota. Carter has worked as a mental health provider with the Indian Health Service in Pine Ridge and Eagle Butte South Dakota and a mental health researcher with the Black Hills Health Care System in Fort Meade, South Dakota. Carter is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and is originally from Belcourt, North Dakota. She earned a Master of Arts degree in Couseling from UND in 1997 and a PhD in Counseling Pyshology in 2011.



Lena Jaques, MPH
Health Promotion Disease Prevention Specialist, Indian Health Service

Lena Deschine Jaques, MPH Lena Deschine Jaques is currently employed with Navajo Area Indian Health Service - Health Promotion Disease Prevention Program as a Health Promotion Disease Prevention Specialist. She has over 20 years' experience in health promotion and wellness. Lena possesses advanced certifications in tobacco cessation, including Certified Instructor of Basic Tobacco Intervention Skills and Instructional Specialist. She also has training in Tobacco Cessation for Maternal & Child Health. She genuinely enjoys working in public health and helping improve the health and well-being of all Native populations. Jaques is an enrolled member of the Navajo Tribe, and is originally from Douglas Mesa Utah, and grew up in Moab Utah. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Human Performance Management & Wellness from Weber State University, and earned a Master's degree in Public Health from Benedictine University.

Joe Law, BS
Health Promotion Disease Prevention Consultant, Indian Health Service

Joe Law has worked in Public Health for 31 years. Joe has four children and one grandchild. Joe is an enrolled member of The Klamath Tribes and has worked at the Indian Health Service for over 20 years. Joe's passion is working with Tribal people and providing services at no-cost to the Tribe or participant.

3:15–4:05 · EARLY DETECTION · 102 A

Bridging the Cancer Care Continuum: A Tribal Partnership Model for Navigation, Education, and Access to Cancer Care

SUMMARY This presentation highlights a Tribal partnership model that improves continuity across cancer care through navigation, education, and coordinated access. It focuses on stronger handoffs, community partnerships, and reducing barriers to transportation, referrals, information, and specialty care.

MODERATOR Dr. Nicky Teufel-Shone



Kellen Polingyumptewa, BS
Hopi Cancer Support Services Manager, Hopi Tribe Department of Health and Human Services

Kellen "Na'kuyi" Polingyumptewa (Hopi Tribe) is Manager of Hopi Cancer Support Services within the Hopi Tribe Department of Health and Human Services. His Hopi name, Na'kuyi, meaning "Medicine Water," reflects the cultural identity he brings to community health and service. Kellen leads Tribal cancer initiatives spanning prevention, early detection, patient navigation, supportive services, health education, and community partnerships. His work strengthens connections among Tribal health programs, the Indian Health Service, academic institutions, cancer centers, and community resources to improve access to cancer care. Through Hopi Cancer Support Services, he has contributed to breast and cervical cancer screening, culturally relevant education, patient navigation, cancer assistance, and partnerships expanding access to specialty care and trusted information. His interests include sustainable Tribal cancer-care systems, culturally responsive navigation, improved clinical and supportive-service pathways, and innovative partnerships and technologies that bring trusted health information closer to Tribal communities.

3:15–4:05 · PREVENTION · 102 B

The Bidirectional Relationship Between Diabetes and Cancer: From Shared Risk to Integrated, Culturally Grounded Prevention

SUMMARY This presentation explores the two-way relationship between type 2 diabetes and cancer and their shared risk factors. It highlights culturally grounded, community-driven approaches to integrating cancer prevention, screening, and education into diabetes care in Tribal communities.

MODERATOR Tanya Riggs



Melinda Smith, PhD
Assistant Research Professor in Health Sciences, Northern Arizona University

Melinda S. Smith, PhD, is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and grew up in northwest Montana on the south end of the Flathead Reservation, at the base of the Mission Mountains. She is an Assistant Research Professor in Health Sciences at Northern Arizona University and a researcher with the Center for Community Health and Engaged Research (CHER). Her research focuses on Indigenous health, with an emphasis on cancer and Type 2 diabetes prevention and management in Indigenous communities. Her work brings together epidemiology, community-engaged research, and health education to better understand cancer and diabetes comorbidity and develop culturally grounded approaches to cancer prevention, early detection, and diabetes self-management. She works closely with tribal communities to strengthen community capacity to address health disparities and support locally driven, sustainable approaches to improving health.

3:15–4:05 · SURVIVORSHIP · 102 C

Cancer Support in Native American Communities

SUMMARY This presentation highlights Cancer Support Community Arizona's no-cost, culturally responsive support for Native American patients, families, and caregivers. Services include navigation, Talking Circles, distress screening, transportation and lodging assistance, education, wellness programs, and community partnerships.

MODERATOR Taryn Watson



Cindy Payne, EdD
Executive Director, Cancer Support Community Arizona (CSCAZ)

Dr. Cindy Payne is Executive Director of Cancer Support Community Arizona (CSCAZ) in northern Arizona. Under her leadership, CSCAZ has expanded emotional and social support for cancer patients, survivors, families, and caregivers across the region. She joined CSCAZ in 2020 and opened its Flagstaff location for in-person services in October 2021. The center provides support groups, education, healthy lifestyle workshops, a Wig Salon, caregiver support, social connections, resources, and referrals for people affected by cancer at any age or stage. Before CSCAZ, Dr. Payne spent nearly 30 years at Northern Arizona University in student support administration and as Educational Psychology faculty, while also contributing leadership to international higher education associations and accessibility initiatives. Her university and community relationships have supported important CSCAZ partnerships, including a national affiliate grant-funded pilot serving young adults in university settings. She holds degrees in political science/pre-law, counseling, and Educational Leadership, Teaching, and Learning.

3:15–4:05 · OTHER · 103 A

Honoring Health, Expanding Access: Colorectal Cancer Screening in AI/AN Communities

SUMMARY This presentation will explore the colorectal cancer screening landscape and strategies to improve screening access, particularly in underserved and American Indian/Alaska Native communities. It will highlight Cologuard Plus and resources to address screening barriers, including patient navigation, financial assistance, and culturally relevant education.

MODERATOR Anna Knight



Beverly Baca, MS

Beverly Baca is a Strategic Account Manager at Exact Sciences, a clinician focused on disease prevention, early cancer detection, and innovation in complex healthcare settings. She spent a decade providing occupational therapy in rural home health settings across New Mexico and Tribal communities, gaining firsthand insight into healthcare access challenges. Recognizing disparities in colorectal cancer screening, Beverly works to expand Cologuard screening across New Mexico and Texas, particularly in Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal healthcare systems. She partners with healthcare leaders to translate cancer prevention goals into practical screening solutions, including digital health integration, care gap identification, patient outreach, and education. She believes effective prevention requires solutions that fit the communities they serve and daily care delivery. She holds a Master of Science in Occupational Therapy and a Bachelor of Science in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, both from the University of New Mexico.



Jess Jamison, MPH

Jess Jamison, MPH, an enrolled member of the Round Valley Indian Tribes, is a public health and health equity leader focused on national partnerships, colorectal cancer screening access, Tribal health engagement, and community-centered strategies to reduce health inequities. She has led initiatives across Abbott, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and the American Cancer Society to strengthen health systems, expand prevention and early detection, and improve outcomes for marginalized communities. Jess holds a Master of Public Health from San Diego State University and a Bachelor of Science in Health Education from California State University, Sacramento.



Jonathan Stutzman, MBA

Jonathan Stutzman is National Accounts Lead at Exact Sciences, a technology-minded healthcare leader focused on federal health system partnerships, colorectal and liver cancer screening access, and operationalizing screening solutions within large health systems. He works with the Veterans Health Administration, the Department of Defense, and the Indian Health Service to turn screening goals into practical workflows, from electronic health record integration to patient outreach. Within IHS, he advocated internally for a Purchased/Referred Care (PRC) workflow that helps clinics offer Cologuard to more of their patients, and that workflow is now in use. Jonathan's work is grounded in a simple belief: a screening test only helps when it fits the way care is delivered. He holds an MBA from the University of North Carolina Wilmington and a BS in Applied Physics from East Carolina University.

4:05–4:30 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Emerging Scholar Cancer Health Equity Efforts - Native American Student Webinar Advisory Coalition (NASWAC) panelists

SUMMARY The Native American Student Webinar Advisory Coalition (NASWAC) will provide a brief overview of the nine-month virtual mentorship program and current and past cohort NASWAC scholars will share their perspective and experiences based on their diverse program involvement.

MODERATORS Chassity Begay, Jennifer Hudson



(Photo Credit: Native Forward)

Gabriel Baca

Gabriel Baca is a first-generation college student, an older brother of 4, and a new mentor to many. His background spans from medical clinics to community health, child health education, and more recently, cancer work. Within his professional career, he has aligned himself well in the cancer prevention and surveillance space and has proceeded to make many connections. Gabriel is a current Physician Assistant (PA) student at NAU in Downtown Phoenix and an enrolled member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe. He serves as NAU's Student Representative for ASAPA, our professional PA advocacy board and is a current NASWAC cohort member for this academic year. He hopes to be able to use his knowledge as a provider to give back to his community and be the generalist that he is training to be. His role is keen on being flexible, approachable, and always willing to provide a hand.



Trena Bizardi, MPH

Trena Bizardi, MPH, CHES, is a Diné public health professional from Dilcon, a community in the southern part of the Navajo Nation, and a 2025 NASWAC alumna. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Interdisciplinary Health at Northern Arizona University, where she serves as a graduate research assistant with the Center for Community Health and Engaged Research. Trena co-owns The People's Planning Group and founded the Northern Arizona Youth Alliance, supporting community engagement and creating opportunities for young people and families. She also serves on the Dilcon Community School Board. Her work reflects a commitment to learning alongside her community and supporting the wellbeing of Indigenous children, families, and communities.



Shannon Taylor

Shannon Taylor, White Mountain Apache & Navajo, resides on the ancestral lands of her mother's people, Dził'ţigai Sí'áń Ndee (White Mountain Apache), in northeastern Arizona. She is a first-generation and non-traditional student in her family. Shannon is currently in her first year of her Graduate program at the University of Arizona (UA). After graduation, Shannon's career goals are to apply her knowledge of GIST and Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK), as well as advancing the representation of Indigenous peoples and knowledges in environmental decision-making and Indigenous data sovereignty. Shannon hopes to highlight the importance of ITEK in western science, she believes that becoming a steward of the land will ensure that the traditional stories, knowledge, practices, ceremonies, and language of Indigenous peoples will live on.



(Photo Credit: Native Forward)

Sanjiv Thompson, MA, MEd

Sanjiv Thompson-Ruiz is from the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, home to the beautiful people of the White Mountain Apache Tribe. He has been an elementary school educator on her reservation for the past 18 years. She is also a proud mother of three and a wife. She earned degrees in American Indian Studies and Elementary Education from Fort Lewis College and a Master of Education in Bilingual and Multicultural Education from Northern Arizona University. She also completed a certificate in Public Health Training in American Indian Health through Johns Hopkins University and pursued studies in Substance Abuse and Addiction at Tohono O'odham Community College. Most recently, Sanjiv earned a Master of Arts in Indigenous Education. She is currently in her first year of the Ph.D. program in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication at the University of Tennessee. Her work focuses on connecting Indigenous knowledge, education, and community well-being to support future generations.



Jennifer Hudson, MPH, CHES
Community Program Coordinator,
Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity

Jennifer Hudson, MPH, CHES, is an enrolled member of the Diné (Navajo) Nation and is of the Mountain Cove clan, born for the Black Streak Wooded People clan. Originally from Gallup, New Mexico, she currently resides in Portland, Oregon. Jennifer serves as a Senior Community Program Coordinator for the Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity at Northern Arizona University, where she earned both her Bachelor of Science in Public Health and Master of Public Health degrees. Jennifer is grateful to continue her research work with Northern Arizona University and the American Cancer Society funded Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity. Her research interests include health equity, public health, and community-based participatory research, with a special interest and focus on improving cancer health equity in Indigenous communities.



Chassity Begay, MPH
Research Coordinator,
Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity

Chassity Begay, MPH is a member of the Navajo Nation and is of the Coyote Pass Clan and born for the Big Water Clan. She works as a Research Coordinator for the Center for Community Health and Engaged Research at Northern Arizona University. Chassity holds an MPH in Health Promotion with an emphasis in Indigenous Health. She has six years of experience working on multiple research projects with Native Nations. She currently works on two research projects for the Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity, and the NIH funded Navajo Nation Native American Research Center for Health led by Diné College.

8:30–9:30 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Cancer and Chronic Disease: Diabetes Panel

SUMMARY This panel will explore the connection between cancer and diabetes, highlighting coordinated care, lifestyle approaches, and community support to improve outcomes in Native American and rural communities.

MODERATOR Anna Knight



Jennifer Erdrich, MD, MPH, MFA, FACS, FSSO
Surgical Oncologist, Associate Professor for the Department of Surgery in the Division of Surgical Oncology, University of Arizona College of Medicine

Dr. Erdrich is a member of the American College of Surgeons, the Society of Surgical Oncology and the Association of American Indian Physicians. From her paternal side, Dr. Erdrich is Turtle Mountain Ojibwe. She has participated in tribally engaged work since high school. She currently collaborates with the San Carlos Apache Healthcare Corporation on the first prehab program for Native American cancer patients preparing for surgery. She strives to expand surgical oncology resources available to local tribal communities through multidisciplinary approaches that leverage innovation and teamwork.



Karen Foster-Schubert, MD, MPH
Medical Director, Tulalip Health System

Dr. Foster-Schubert obtained her M.D. degree from Johns Hopkins and her M.P.H. degree from the University of Washington. Her current research projects focus on identifying hormonal and physiological factors that predict successful weight loss maintenance after diet and exercise. She is also investigating the impact of varying dietary energy density on body weight regulatory hormones and appetite. Additionally, she is working on developing a new imaging method to measure the parameters of hypothalamic regulation of body weight in humans.



Timian Godfrey, DNP, FNP-BC, FAAN
Clinical Assistant Professor,
University of Arizona College of Nursing

Dr. Timian M. Godfrey, DNP, FNP-BC, FAAN, is a Navajo nurse practitioner, clinical faculty member, and PhD candidate at Arizona State University. As Co-Leader of the NACP Psychosocial Support Pilot, she partners with the LeChee Chapter of the Navajo Nation, Community Health Representatives, and a Community Advisory Committee to culturally adapt a diabetes self-management and social support intervention for American Indian adults living with type 2 diabetes and conditions with a high risk for cancer. Grounded in Diné values, including K'é, her work uses Talking Circles and community-based participatory methods to strengthen family and community support systems and improve chronic disease outcomes among Navajo adults and their families.



Sheila Hammer, MSW, LCSW
Associate Clinical Professor,
Northern Arizona University

Sheila Hammer, MSW, LCSW received her Master of Social Work from the University of Southern California (USC) in 2009. She worked as an oncology social worker at City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center for nearly four years before becoming the Program Director for Cancer Support Community. She has been engaged with Cancer Support Community for over ten years, six as a working professional and four as a volunteer, serving on their Professional Advisory Board. She is an Associate Clinical Professor for Northern Arizona University's School of Social Work and is a PhD candidate in NAU's Interdisciplinary Health program. Sheila's developing research agenda focuses on cancer health equity for American Indians, with a particular interest in improving psychosocial oncology care. Sheila believes in culturally-responsive psychosocial care that honors each patient's unique experiences and meets them where they are; caring for the whole person, body, mind, and soul.



Melinda Smith, PhD
Assistant Research Professor in Health Sciences, Northern Arizona University

Melinda S. Smith, PhD, is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and grew up in northwest Montana on the south end of the Flathead Reservation, at the base of the Mission Mountains. She is an Assistant Research Professor in Health Sciences at Northern Arizona University and a researcher with the Center for Community Health and Engaged Research (CHER). Her research focuses on Indigenous health, with an emphasis on cancer and Type 2 diabetes prevention and management in Indigenous communities. Her work brings together epidemiology, community-engaged research, and health education to better understand cancer and diabetes comorbidity and develop culturally grounded approaches to cancer prevention, early detection, and diabetes self-management. She works closely with tribal communities to strengthen community capacity to address health disparities and support locally driven, sustainable approaches to improving health.

9:30–10:30 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Humor Healing: A Journey of Empowerment and Healing, My Cancer Road

SUMMARY A personal journey of healing and empowerment with James Junes, exploring how humor, resilience, and family support have helped him navigate colorectal cancer and find strength and purpose.

MODERATOR Dr. Darold Joseph



James Junes. Motivational/Guest Speaker

The challenges I experienced in my youth upbringing, and sharing my personal experiences of my life growing up on the Rez. Ultimately, persevering through the tough times, the lessons I learned along the way, that helped me to create a lifestyle of wellness, good health and strength to GROW. A mission to heal the healers, empower the humans and simplify the journey to happiness. My path to live life with a great purpose and with strength, resilience and renewal, the journey is ours to own, nurture and to celebrate. Our journey is unique, it is sacred, and it is out to embrace with open arms. I am Red Water Clan born for Bear Clan, my Paternal Clan is Water Edge Clan, my Maternal Clan is Tangle Clan, and my Hopi Clan is Roadrunner.

10:45–11:30 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Cancer Patient Navigation Overview

SUMMARY This presentation provides an overview of cancer patient navigation, highlighting how navigators support patients and families, coordinate care, and address barriers throughout the cancer journey.

MODERATOR Anna Knight



Taryn Watson, MEd
National Health Education Consultant, Indian Health Service

A citizen of the Diné Nation, Taryn works with the IHS Headquarters Division of Clinical and Community Services as a Public Health Advisor/National Health Education Consultant. Ms. Watson earned her Bachelor's Degree in Community Health Sciences from the University of Arizona and Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University. Her extensive professional experience is centered in public health management and administration, working specifically within IHS programs and dedicated to supporting tribal and urban communities.

1:15–2:05 · PLENARY · 101A–101C

Anal Cancer

SUMMARY This presentation reviews anal cancer risk factors, prevention, screening, and treatment, with a strong focus on HPV and higher-risk populations. It highlights HPV vaccination, anal cancer screening methods, and evidence that treating high-grade precancerous lesions can reduce cancer risk.

MODERATOR Dr. Braiden Eilers



Andrew Yu, MS, RN, ACRN
HIV/HCV/STI Branch National Clinical Coordinator, Indian Health Service

Andrew Yu, MS, RN, ACRN is the National Clinical Coordinator for the HIV/HCV/STI Branch at IHS Headquarters. In his role, he provides technical assistance to IHS/Tribal/Urban Indian programs on topics related to the HIV syndemic. He is also an HIV certified public health nurse who has been working with people living with HIV and providing sexual health services for the past 15 years. He received his Bachelors of Science in Nursing from Georgetown University and his Masters in Community and Public Health Nursing from Hunter College in New York City and is currently pursuing his Doctorate in Nursing Practice at the University of Maryland.

1:15–2:05 · SURVIVORSHIP · 102 B

Advancing Survivorship in Native Communities

SUMMARY An exploration of cancer survivorship in Native communities, highlighting culturally relevant resources, survivor voices, and community partnerships that strengthen support for survivors and caregivers.

MODERATOR Taryn Watson



Emily Bobyock, MPH
Epidemiologist,
American Indian Cancer Foundation

Emily Bobyock is an Epidemiologist at the American Indian Cancer Foundation (AICAF), where she has supported data-driven efforts to address cancer disparities in Native communities for the past three years. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Drexel University and a Master of Public Health in Epidemiology from the University of Pittsburgh. With more than eight years of public health experience, including roles in a local health department and a colorectal cancer screening program, Emily is passionate about using data to inform public health programs and improve health outcomes in underserved populations. At AICAF, she provides data support across a variety of initiatives focused on advancing cancer prevention and control in Native communities.



Jenna Calder, MS
National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program Manager,
American Indian Cancer Foundation

Jenna is an enrolled member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and serves as the NCCCP Program Manager at the American Indian Cancer Foundation (AICAF). In her role, she supports comprehensive cancer control efforts in partnership with Tribal Nations across the country. Jenna is passionate about the overall wellness of Native communities and advancing efforts to improve health outcomes across Indian Country. Jenna holds a Master of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Leadership. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family and being outdoors.

1:15–2:05 · PREVENTION · 102 C

Bridging Cancer Care and Community: Addressing Psychosocial Needs Patients

SUMMARY This presentation highlights whole-person cancer care by addressing emotional, social, practical, and spiritual needs alongside medical treatment. It also emphasizes culturally responsive support, including family involvement, traditional healing, community resources, and American Indian-led approaches.

MODERATOR Megan Russell



Sheila Hammer, MSW, LCSW
Associate Clinical Professor, Northern Arizona University

Sheila Hammer, MSW, LCSW received her Master of Social Work from the University of Southern California (USC) in 2009. She worked as an oncology social worker at City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center for nearly four years before becoming the Program Director for Cancer Support Community. She has been engaged with Cancer Support Community for over ten years, six as a working professional and four as a volunteer, serving on their Professional Advisory Board. She is an Associate Clinical Professor for Northern Arizona University's School of Social Work and is a PhD candidate in NAU's Interdisciplinary Health program. Sheila's developing research agenda focuses on cancer health equity for American Indians, with a particular interest in improving psychosocial oncology care. Sheila believes in culturally-responsive psychosocial care that honors each patient's unique experiences and meets them where they are; caring for the whole person, body, mind, and soul.

1:15–2:05 · OTHER · 103 A

From Molecular Data to Community Benefit: Indigenous Priorities in Cancer Genomics

SUMMARY An exploration of how cancer genomics research can improve care for Native communities, highlighting Indigenous representation and the role of precision medicine in guiding treatment. It emphasizes community priorities, trusted partnerships, and respect for Tribal and Indigenous data sovereignty.

MODERATOR Anna Knight



Nicole Halmai, PhD
Assistant Professor, University of Arizona

Dr. Nicole Halmai (Navajo/Diné) is an Assistant Professor at the University of Arizona. She earned her Ph.D. in Molecular, Cellular and Integrative Physiology from the University of California, Davis in 2019 and completed a postdoctoral fellowship there focused on cancer health disparities. Dr. Halmai works at the intersection of cancer genomics and community-based participatory research. Her research uses patient-derived cancer models and molecular data to improve cancer outcomes for underserved communities. She is particularly focused on applying cancer genomic data in partnership with Tribal communities to support research driven by Native health priorities and strengthen Tribal healthcare capacity. Dr. Halmai has received multiple research fellowships, including an NIH T32 training fellowship and an American Association for Cancer Research cancer health disparities fellowship. She currently holds an NIH K99/R00 career development award supporting her work with Tribes in Northern California and Arizona.

2:15–3:05 · PLENARY · 101A-101C

Mayo Clinic: Patient Navigation

SUMMARY An overview of Mayo Clinic's patient navigation services for American Indian and Alaska Native patients, highlighting culturally responsive support throughout cancer and transplant care. It will explore how navigators address financial and logistical barriers, connect patients with resources, and collaborate with Tribal healthcare partners.

MODERATOR Taryn Watson



Eva Bighorse
Patient Navigator, Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center

Eva Bighorse serves as the Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center Patient Navigator supporting American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) patients. She brings extensive expertise in culturally centered patient navigation and advocacy including Purchase Referred Care navigation, while also serving as Secretary for the Arizona Supporting Indigenous Peoples' Mayo Employee Resource Group (SIP MERG). Prior to her current role, she served as the Tribal Health Coordinator for the Arizona Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) where she administered the Fee-For-Service Tribal Health Program and oversaw subcontracted managed care plans delivering integrated medical and behavioral health services to AI/AN members statewide in partnership with the Arizona Medicaid agency, AHCCCS. A citizen of the Cayuga Nation of the Haudenosaunee, Eva is also born for the Yucca-Fruit-Strung-In-A-Line clan of the Navajo Nation.



Silena Thomas
Patient Navigator, Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center

Silena Thomas is a member of the Navajo Nation and serves as a Patient Navigator at the Mayo Clinic supporting American Indian and Alaska Native patients referred for transplant evaluation. She is from Indian Wells, Arizona, and is Tábąąhá (Edgewater Clan), born for Tótsohnií (Big Water Clan). Her maternal grandfather's clan is Honágháahnii (One Who Walks Around Clan), and her paternal grandfather's clan is Kinyaa'áanii (Towering House Clan).
In her role, Silena helps patients and families navigate the complex transplant process by providing culturally responsive education, care coordination, advocacy, and support. She is dedicated to reducing barriers to care, improving access to transplant services, and advancing health equity for Native communities.

2:15–3:05 · EARLY DETECTION · 102 A

One Stop Cancer Shop, Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition

SUMMARY This presentation explores medical mistrust, cancer disparities, and how lived experiences and health care practices can affect engagement and outcomes. It also highlights practical ways providers can build trust through empathy, cultural competence, and stronger relationships.

MODERATOR Elfreida Barton



Elizabeth Clifford
Community Health Worker, Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition

Elizabeth Clifford is a Community Health Worker at Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition. She is a member of the Omaha Tribe. She is on the board of One Stop Cancer Shop.



Mark Darby, RN, APRN, MSN, FNPc, PMHNPBC
Nurse Practitioner, Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition

Mark Darby is a dual certified Nurse Practitioner in Family and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner. He is project organizer of the One Stop Cancer Shop which used relational organizing to build a broad community partnership the educates health care professionals about medical mistrust and brings cancer screening to local communities. He has practiced healthcare in underserved communities for 40 years. He was Nebraska Medicaid Provider of the Year in 2022.

2:15–3:05 · SURVIVORSHIP · 102 B

Roots of Resilience: Tulalip Tribes Cancer Survivorship and Cultural Healing Initiative

SUMMARY An introduction to Tulalip Tribes' Roots of Resilience initiative, highlighting culturally grounded cancer survivorship support, hereditary cancer-risk navigation, and care coordination. It also explores connections between cancer and diabetes and the role of traditional healing, lifestyle approaches, and community support in promoting wellness.

MODERATOR Dr. Nicky Teufel-Shone



Karen Foster-Schubert, MD, MPH
Medical Director, Tutalip Health System

Dr. Foster-Schubert obtained her M.D. degree from Johns Hopkins and her M.P.H. degree from the University of Washington. Her current research projects focus on identifying hormonal and physiological factors that predict successful weight loss maintenance after diet and exercise. She is also investigating the impact of varying dietary energy density on body weight regulatory hormones and appetite. Additionally, she is working on developing a new imaging method to measure the parameters of hypothalamic regulation of body weight in humans.



Gary Ferguson, ND
Chief Health Administrator, Director of Integrative Medicine, Tulalip Health System

Dr. Gary Ferguson is Chief Health Administrator and Director of Integrative Medicine for the Tulalip Health System. A Naturopathic Physician, he has spent much of his career in Tribal health, promoting wellness-based, culturally connected, population-health approaches and Indigenous ways of healing. Dr. Ferguson is Unangax^ (Aleut), an enrolled member of the Qagan Tayagungin Tribe from Sand Point, Alaska. As a speaker and teacher, he promotes traditional plants as food and medicine and co-created the Store Outside Your Door initiative, which teaches communities to hunt, fish, gather, and grow traditional foods. Before joining Tulalip Health System, he served as Research Assistant Professor and Director of Outreach & Engagement at Washington State University's IREACH. His leadership also includes serving as CEO of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, senior roles at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and clinical service in his home region at Eastern Aleutian Tribes.



Veronica Leahy, DCES
Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) Grant Coordinator, Tulalip Health System

Veronica "Roni" Leahy serves as our SDPI Grant Coordinator and is a certified Diabetes Community Education Specialist (DCES). She has worked for the Tulalip Tribes for over 15 years in the Diabetes program, supporting our team approach to diabetes care and management. Roni organizes various diabetes prevention outreach activities, classes, day camps, and field trips in collaboration with various tribal departments. In addition, as a WSU Master Gardener, she manages our health clinic's vegetable, berry, and medicinal gardens and other local farm activities.

2:15–3:05 · PREVENTION · 102 C

American Indian Cancer Treatment Network

SUMMARY This presentation outlines the American Indian Cancer Treatment Network's strategy to reduce barriers to cancer treatment through education, Tribal ownership, and systems change. It emphasizes building local cancer-care capacity, expanding Native representation, integrating traditional healing, and strengthening Tribal control of cancer resources.

MODERATOR Tanya Riggs



Jeff Tomhave, JD
Lawyer, American Indian Cancer Treatment Network

Jeff Tomhave, JD (enrolled Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikira Nation) is dedicated to helping tribes secure infrastructure, healthcare access, and funding resources. Through the Tomhave Group, he works with tribes and tribal organizations to develop strategy, secure funding, and navigate systems.Getting cancer treatment at the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation on the Navajo Nation took 10 years. Finding the oncologists and equipping the specialty pharmacy was the easy part. Getting the federal regulations that provide reimbursement for these services was the hard part.That experience led Jeff to develop the American Indian Cancer Treatment Network, which is advised by the handful of Native oncology clinicians around the country. The Network's mission is to advance health sovereignty by helping tribes develop the resources and capacity to provide community based and culturally relevant cancer treatment.

2:15–3:05 · OTHER · 103 A

Cancer Advocacy 101

SUMMARY An introduction to patient advocacy through the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), highlighting policy efforts to strengthen cancer research, screening, and access to care. It will explore opportunities to share personal stories, engage lawmakers, and support policies that benefit Tribal communities and others affected by cancer.

MODERATOR Adeline June



Brian Hummell
Arizona and New Mexico Director of Government Relations,
American Cancer Society Action Network

Brian Hummell is the Arizona and New Mexico Director of Government Relations for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. In his 12th year with ACS CAN, Brian has led and built coalitions to achieve significant legislative success for Arizona's and New Mexico's cancer community, including Medicaid expansion in Arizona in 2013. Brian has also led or been a part of coalitions responsible for a number of other access to care wins for patients at the state level including Biomarker Testing Coverage legislation in both states. Additionally, Brian has provided technical assistance tobacco regulation campaigns at the local level in Arizona. In 2014, Brian received both the ACS CAN National Advocacy Leadership Award and the C-Change President's Award. In 2017 he was the recipient of the Prevent Cancer Foundation Laureate Award for Advocacy.



Cristianne Scherrer
Arizona Grassroots Manager,
American Cancer Society Action Network

Cristianne Scherrer is the Arizona Grassroots Manager for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), leading volunteer advocacy for policies that improve cancer outcomes. She organizes advocacy events and lobby days, mobilizes voters, and connects constituents with lawmakers. Cristianne has expanded ACS CAN's presence at Arizona State University and the University of Arizona through the Colleges Against Cancer program. She also works with coalitions on cancer prevention, access to care, and health equity. In 2026, she was appointed to the Arizona Department of Health Services' Tobacco Revenue, Use, Spending & Tracking (TRUST) Commission and the University of Arizona Cancer Center's Training Education Community Advisory Board (TECAB). In these roles, she supports investments in public health, cancer research, and workforce development. Her work reflects a commitment to giving everyone a fair opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer.

3:20–3:50 · PLENARY / GENERAL

Four Directions Discussion/Closing

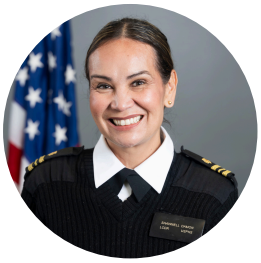
SUMMARY An interactive closing discussion using the Four Ds - Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny - to reflect on conference lessons and identify shared priorities. Participants will explore opportunities for action and commit to practical next steps within their organizations and communities.

MODERATOR Taryn Watson



Julie Armin, PhD
Associate Professor, University of Arizona

Julie Armin PhD is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family & Community Medicine at the University of Arizona, co-lead of the Outreach and Engagement Core of the Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP), and affiliated faculty with the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities. As a non-Native researcher, she is passionate about partnering with communities and organizations to produce impactful evidence that facilitates improved healthcare, including accessible, inclusive cancer care that builds on the strengths of communities. She brings her training as a humanistic social scientist to inform qualitative, multi-method and community-based research approaches. She is co-leading the My Health My Choice project with Dr. Darold Joseph, which is funded by an American Cancer Society Research Scholar Grant through the Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity at Northern Arizona University.



LCDR Shawnell Damon, DrPH, MPH, MSc
Senior Public Health Advisor, Indian Health Service

Shawnell Damon is the granddaughter of the late Molly Damon and Navajo Code Talker Anson Damon, Sr., and daughter of Lucinda Damon of Old Sawmill, Arizona. Born and raised on the Navajo Nation, she is Ashiihi, born for Bilagáana, with Tódích'íi'nii maternal grandfathers, and is the mother of two daughters. LCDR Damon holds degrees in Biology, Public Health, Cellular and Molecular Medicine, and a Doctor of Public Health from the University of Arizona. Her Indian Health Service leadership roles have included Health Promotion Disease Prevention Coordinator, Chief of Epidemiology for COVID-19, Acting Area Diabetes Coordinator, and Acting Public Health Director for the Navajo Area. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she co-led the unified response across the Navajo Nation, Tribal health programs, and IHS. She currently serves as a Senior Public Health Advisor at IHS Headquarters, supporting sustainable public health infrastructure, advisories, and community messaging across Indian Country.



Carol Goldtooth, MPH
Community Program Coordinator, Senior Health Educator,
Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention

Carol Goldtooth is a citizen of the Navajo Nation in Arizona. Her Maternal Clan is Kinyaa'aanii (Towering House People); her Paternal Clan is Biih bitoodnii (Deer Springs People); her Maternal Grandfather's Clan is Tl'izi lani (Manygoats People); and her Paternal Grandfather's Clan is Tl'aashchi'i (Red Left Hand People). She is culturally grounded and fluent in her Native language. She is the Community Program Coordinator and Senior/Health Educator for the Outreach and Engagement Core of the Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention. For over 20 years, Carol's work and interests have focused on public health and related disparities among Native Americans, utilizing a community-engagement approach to foster trust, collaboration, and empowerment.

Day 1 & Day 2 · Wellness Room · 104

Honor Board/Healing Space

SUMMARY An overview of Mayo Clinic's patient navigation services for American Indian and Alaska Native patients, highlighting culturally responsive support throughout cancer and transplant care. It will explore how navigators address financial and logistical barriers, connect patients with resources, and collaborate with Tribal healthcare partners.

MODERATORS Lucinda Charleston, Anna Knight



Lucinda Charleston, MPH
Bemidji Area Health Promotion DIsease Prevention Consultant,
Indian Health Service

Yaateeh! I'm Red Running into Water, born to Bitter water, my maternal grandfather are Red house and paternal grandparent are Water Edge. I am Lucinda Charleston, a dedicated mother of five talented children and a proud grandmother of six. I currently serve as a Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Consultant with the Bemidji Area Office.
I have a Master of Public Health and a Certificate in Health Care Quality and Patient Safety. I am passionate about communicating meaningful health messages, promoting wellness, and serving as a leader for positive change within communities. I believe strongly in the power of positive thinking, cultural knowledge, and community connection to support healthier individuals, families, and communities.
Beyond my professional work, I enjoy learning new creative skills, including beadwork, jewelry making, and embroidery. Most of all, she treasures spending quality time with her six grandchildren, who bring her tremendous joy and inspiration.



Anna Knight, MS, APRN, FNP-C
Nurse Practitioner Health Consultant, Area Health Promotion Disease Prevention Consultant,
Indian Health Service

Anna Knight currently works at the California Area Office, Office of Public Health as a NP Health Consultant /Area HPDP consultant providing guidance and technical assistance to tribal and urban programs in California. Current projects include increasing cancer screening and early detection throughout IHS and to help improve care for brain injury survivors. She received her BSN from San Diego State University in 1997, and her MS, FNP from Georgetown University in 2013 and is currently enrolled at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science for her doctorate in nursing. Her clinical experience includes: family practice, internal medicine, nephrology/transplant, urgent care, transitional care management, advanced wound care, pediatric and adult forensics. Anna and her husband Tim have 4 children and 8 grandchildren. They share a love for road trips to spend time with family and friends. Anna is also an endometrial cancer survivor with 6 years of being cancer free.