

#### CONNECTING PIPELINES TO PATHWAYS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

Navigating Pathways and Partnerships to Enhance Opportunities and Outcomes for American Indians and Alaska Natives in Medicine: Insights from a Native American Center for Health Professions (NACHP)

#### THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

#### KEY POINTS

- ✓ Programs specifically addressing the needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives (collectively abbreviated AI) and Indigenous communities and focusing on the unique historical, cultural, and socioeconomic perspectives of those individuals and communities
- ✓ Meaningful and authentic partnerships that build trust with tribal leaders and indigenous communities through regular meetings and visits to tribal communities
- ✓ Synergistic and interconnected engagement of school, campus partners, and community partners with focused expansion of existing programs to enrich opportunities for AIs
- ✓ Creation of age-specific and culturally responsive, diversified, year-round, long-term longitudinal pathway opportunities and touch points that begin in elementary/middle school and extend through professional degree level programs
- ✓ Maintaining contact with participants across programs within a longitudinal pathway of ongoing opportunities
- ✓ An essential infrastructure with dedicated central support for administrative, faculty, staff, and student leaders and participants to successfully implement, oversee, and assess programs, as well as secure additional funding and sustain programmatic growth

#### ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Wisconsin (WI) is home to 12 sovereign nations with > 86,000 AIs making up 1.2 percent of the state's population (U.S. Census). Unfortunately, WI counties with substantial AI populations have some of the poorest health outcomes in the state, due in part to critical health profession shortages in underserved rural and urban areas (UW Population Health Institute) compounded by significant underrepresentation of AIs in medicine in Wisconsin and throughout the United States (AAMC).



*Graduation Photo 2019  
(last in-person graduation ceremony)*

### THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH (UWSMPH) APPROACH

UWSMPH established the Native American Center for Health Professions (NACHP) to eliminate barriers and improve health equity for AIs in Wisconsin and beyond by addressing the significant underrepresentation of AIs in healthcare profession education programs and, ultimately, enhance the number of practicing AI providers and next-generation AI leaders across health systems.

NACHP was established at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (UWSMPH) in 2012 under the visionary leadership of its founding physician director, Dr. Erik Brodt, who acutely recognized the need to enhance recruitment of AIs to health professions. The NACHP office currently benefits from an operational infrastructure that includes a full-time administrative director, one full-time and two part-time professional staff members, student worker support, student volunteers, and a part-time faculty physician director, all of whom are members of tribal communities.

#### Expanding Program Partnerships and Presence

Given the broad multi-faceted scope of its operations, NACHP also benefits greatly from strong partnerships with existing groups and organizations. It receives administrative support through academic affairs in the dean's office and benefits from external advisory board input and engaged collaborative partnerships with tribal communities and campus programs. Over the past several years it has established close partnerships with five tribal communities in Wisconsin, in affiliation with the Indians into Medicine grant through the Indian Health Service, and continues to expand and enhance partnerships with all tribal communities across the state.

In addition to support from the school and WI tribes, the systematic, multi-pronged longitudinal approach promoted by NACHP has been supported by the UW CTSA award and Indians into Medicine grants. NACHP is housed in a central, highly visible location at UWSMPH in a newly renovated suite shared with the UWSMPH Office of Multicultural Affairs that includes offices as well as kitchen



*Graduation Photo 2018*

and shared study/hang-out lounge space for AI students, staff, and faculty.

When NACHP began in 2012, the number of medical students in the entire UWSMPH student body was less than five students. In the fall of 2020, eleven AI students matriculated to the first-year MD class alone, making up approximately six percent of the class and establishing UWSMPH as one of the national leaders for recruitment of AI applicants. This success reflects several intentional multi-pronged efforts to advance the programmatic goals of NACHP to prepare, recruit, retain, and graduate AI students and provide service to AI populations and communities through culturally responsive programming, mentorship, and community support.

With a keen focus on meaningful collaboration and partnership with tribal nations, as well as existing school and campus programs, NACHP provides ongoing support and access to key learning, enrichment, and support opportunities that enhance AI applicants' qualifications, preparedness, and scholarship for entry into health profession degree programs and successful retention of AI health profession students for future productive careers in medicine and other health professions. NACHP has helped recruit and retain AI medical, nursing, pharmacy, physician assistant, physical therapy, public health, social work, and veterinary medicine students at the UW. This interprofessional focus helps build community and provides rich opportunities for pre-professional degree students to follow career interests in multiple health fields.

### Program Support: From Elementary School Through Professional Degree Programs

NACHP engages AI learners from late elementary school throughout health profession degree programs, emphasizing early health career exposure, preparing more AI applicants for success in health profession degree programs, augmenting culturally responsive programming and community-based learning opportunities to foster a sense of belonging and aid retention, and expanding Native-specific health-focused education to promote service to AI communities.

Early healthcare exposure opportunities for pre-college and early college students has included multiple in-person and virtual activities, often involving expanded partnerships with local schools, tribal communities and other existing campus and statewide programs (e.g., UW-Madison's Precollege Enrichment Opportunity Program for Learning Excellence and Wisconsin Area Health Education Centers [WI-AHEC] programs), as well as regional partnerships. Current AI health profession degree students often support these efforts, serving as role models for interested pre-college students.

These programs have included Indigenous Health and Wellness Days, individual student outreach efforts, Medicine Talkers Podcast, the UW

Information Technology Academy, Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council - Native American Research Center for Health American Indian Science Scholars program, and the WI-AHEC Health Career Camp. The strong partnerships with tribal communities and campus programs significantly expands opportunities for AIs with growing interests in health careers and provides a true longitudinal pathway with multiple options to participate in immersive activities and build longstanding connections with NACHP students, staff, and faculty.

### Emphasis on Mentoring, Community-Building, and Cultural Immersion

Multiple opportunities to prepare applicants for successful recruitment to professional school degree programs include active partnerships with local, regional, and national programs, such as: the UWSMPH Rural and Urban Scholars in Community Health program; WI-AHEC Community Health Internship, Express, and Scholars Programs; Health Professions Shadowing Program; Great Lakes Applicant Workshop; American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) National Recruitment events; and Association of American Indian Physicians National Recruitment events. After recruitment to one of the health professions degree programs, additional programs exist to provide AI students with scholarship support, to enhance learning, to build community, and to provide one-



*Indigenous Health and Wellness Day, Camp Randall, 2019*

on-one mentoring. These include community immersion activities, such as wild rice and white corn harvest trips and family dinners with AI staff and faculty.

An annual, distinguished lecture series brings in three outside AI speakers each year; tribal clinic rotations provide clinical learning opportunities; and a newly developed AI health elective course enhances knowledge about unique healthcare issues facing AI individuals and communities. Medical students may also participate in community research, paths of distinction in public health or research, and/or dedicated clinical and community education tracks learning in rural (through the Wisconsin Academy of Rural Health - WARM) and urban (through the Training in Urban Medicine and Public Health - TRIUMPH program) communities across UWSMPH statewide campus sites.

**Dedicated Graduation Recognition and Celebration**

The culmination of professional degree completion from any of the education programs affiliated with NACHP at UW-Madison includes a dedicated graduation recognition event for AI graduates, family, friends, faculty, and staff. This special celebration includes native foods, traditional honor songs, blessings, keynote speakers, and a blanket ceremony to honor and recognize the graduates.

These events also serve as an occasion to promote the ongoing connection of AI alumni to NACHP with the goal of enhancing future opportunities to recruit AI faculty, NACHP advisory board members, NACHP volunteers for ongoing activities, and, ideally, future leaders in academic medicine and within tribal communities, optimizing health outcomes for AI patients and serving as mentors and preceptors for future AI students.

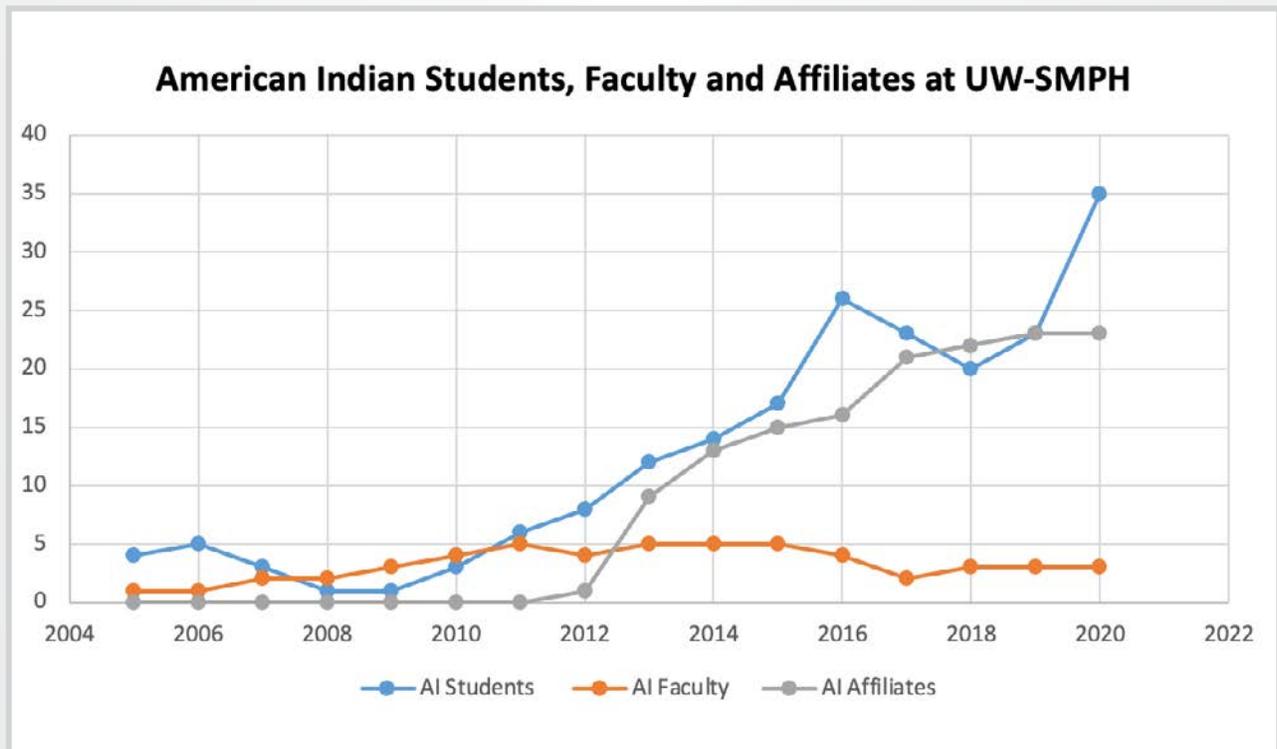


Figure 1 Legend: This chart includes students across all SMPH health professional degree programs (DPT, MD, MGCS, MPAS, and MPH).

## RESULTS/OUTCOMES

NACHP has demonstrated remarkable gains in AI student recruitment, retention, and graduation rates:

- A 560 percent increase in AI medical student (MD) matriculants from 5 to 28
- A 100 percent graduation rate across all health profession programs since its inception
- 15 MD graduates from 2105-2020 and 42 graduates in other health professions degree programs during that time frame (see Figure 1)
- Incoming class of 2020 saw its highest number of AI matriculants in the history of UWSMPH, with 11 students in the class, with a recruitment rate of 19 percent (57 AI applicants to 11 matriculants)
- Student participation in pathway programs has led to marked increases in AI students across all health profession training programs.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RELATED MATERIALS ABOUT THE NATIVE AMERICAN CENTER FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONS:

<https://www.med.wisc.edu/education/native-american-center-for-health-professions>

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The AAHC Case Studies in **Connecting Pipelines to Pathways for Health Equity** are an initiative of the AAHC Chief Academic Officers executive leadership group in partnership with the AAHC Sullivan Alliance.