



Turtle Mountain Community College Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program—Overview and Preliminary Outcomes

This practice brief is one in a series of practice briefs being developed by the Tribal HPOG evaluation team, comprised of NORC at the University of Chicago, Red Star Innovations and the National Indian Health Board (NIHB). The briefs will be used to disseminate important lessons learned and findings from the Evaluation of the Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, which is funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The HPOG program is funded by the Affordable Care Act to support 32 demonstration projects, including five Tribal Organizations and Colleges, to train Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals as healthcare professionals. The Tribal HPOG program aims to meet local healthcare demands by increasing the number of well-trained health professionals in tribal communities. The program is designed using a career pathways approach where students advance through related trainings that build on each other to deepen students' healthcare knowledge and skills. This practice brief provides an overview of the Turtle Mountain Community College (TMCC) Tribal HPOG program and key findings to date.

OVERVIEW OF THE TMCC TRIBAL HPOG PROGRAM

Turtle Mountain Community College (TMCC) is a tribally controlled and accredited college that is located within the boundaries of the Turtle Mountain Indian reservation near Belcourt, North Dakota. TMCC primarily serves the educational needs of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, but is open to any person who is pursuing higher education. The Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program at TMCC is called Project CHOICE: Choosing Health Opportunities for Indian Career Enhancement. The goal of Project CHOICE is to create educational opportunities for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals through health profession training programs at TMCC. Project CHOICE students have the opportunity to enroll in a number of programs—the Clinical/Medical Lab Technician Program (Lab Tech), which includes a certificate program in Phlebotomy; the Pharmacy Technician Program (Pharm Tech); the Certified Nursing Assistant Program (CNA); the Licensed Vocational Nursing Program (LPN); and the Health Information Management Program (HIM). Project CHOICE provides a broad spectrum of supportive services to students in order to address both academic and social support needs. These services include reimbursement for transportation mileage and childcare costs, financial assistance for tuition and other training expenses, tutoring, access to technology, and job placement and employability services.

KEY FINDINGS TO DATE¹

Program Structures

- **Overall commitment, passion, and dedication of staff.** TMCC administrators and students feel that staff and faculty are highly committed to Project CHOICE and are focused on the program's success and long-term sustainability at the college.
- **Ability to create a “one-stop shop” to better serve students.** Project CHOICE restructured their staffing to streamline the process of accessing supportive services, which had previously required meeting with multiple case managers. In addition, they removed the “case manager” title, which had negative connotations and often led to individuals avoiding services. Each student now meets with their assigned “Support Service Specialist” who coordinates all services and ensures needs are addressed.
- **Establishment of high quality academic programs.** HPOG funding through Project CHOICE helped build upon TMCC's allied health programs. TMCC faculty and staff have worked to improve the quality of education for their students through building rigorous curricula for allied health programs as well as achieving accreditation for these programs. TMCC is now the only tribal college in the U.S. offering a fully accredited pharmacy technician program, and their Lab Tech program is one of only two accredited Clinical/Medical Lab Technician Programs in the state of North Dakota.

¹ The findings to date section on program structures, program processes, and program outcomes are derived from three site visits to TMCC which included key informant interviews with administrative and program implementation

staff, focus groups with the TMCC students, and completer and non-completer phone interviews with TMCC students. Information was pulled directly from the interviews and focus groups.

Program Processes

- Intensive screening process of program applicants.** Project CHOICE focuses on admitting dedicated, well-qualified students who are likely to be successful in their training programs. The screening committee consists of the Project CHOICE Director, Support Service Specialists, and TMCC instructors, who review applications and interview candidates for admission. Staff have found that this screening process helps to ensure the commitment of admitted students and promotes their retention in the training programs.
- Importance of supportive services to program delivery.** Both the academic and basic living needs of Project CHOICE participants are supported through a variety of services, such as tuition assistance, transportation, childcare, computer access, and job placement and employability services. The provision of these supportive services makes it possible for them to participate in the academic programs and, according to students, facilitates their retention and graduation.
- Adapting services to ensure student needs are met.** Since program onset, students have expressed concerns about leaving their homes and support systems if they have to relocate for a job. Although healthcare providers are in high demand statewide, there is limited job availability on the Turtle Mountain reservation and in the surrounding county. Project CHOICE allocated funds to offer financial assistance to program graduates to help them secure housing and childcare in a new area. When they found that leaving the familial support system on the reservation was a greater challenge for graduates than anticipated, Project CHOICE developed an employability boot camp to further support students' transition to employment and help them build connections with employers and other native communities outside of the local area.

Program Outcomes²

- Successful enrollment and completion of students across programs.** To date, Project CHOICE has enrolled nearly 200 students in training programs, and approximately 70 percent have completed their programs.³ In particular, according to Project CHOICE program staff, the CNA program has been a cost-effective means of training a high number of individuals in a short period of time. Project CHOICE is committed to supporting students through program completion and is actively seeking opportunities to sustain the academic programs after HPOG funding ends so that future students can benefit from the training opportunities.
- Growing employment of students in the local community and statewide.** While some program completers have chosen to further their education at another college or university, others have obtained employment in their trained profession. Although the local job market is limited, healthcare facilities typically experience a high rate of CNA turnover, resulting in more frequent job openings. The majority of CNA program completers have successfully obtained employment in the local community soon after becoming certified. For the other programs, students often need to relocate to other parts of the state for greater employment opportunities. Project CHOICE staff expect an increase in employment over the next year as students complete their programs and participate in

"This program has impacted my life tremendously. I would have to go back to work, I wouldn't be able to go to classes, I am tapped out on my scholarships. This year would have been rough. I wouldn't be here if not for Project CHOICE. Don't get rid of the program."

–TMCC Program Participant

the employability boot camp that will help them to navigate the job market and find a position for which they are willing to relocate.

- High level of satisfaction with Project CHOICE among stakeholders.**

According to stakeholders, Project CHOICE is perceived as having a positive return on investment and producing graduates who will help fill healthcare workforce shortages in the region and across the state, in the short and long term. Local employers feel that the program is mutually advantageous, since

"I think this program is awesome. I love it so much. I come to school, I have something to work for, I have a goal. It is so much better having that help. It all helps me to better myself for my home life, for my daughter. And I hope it gives her the thought, 'my mom was able to do it and get help,' and she will be able to do the same. There are programs out there to help us."

–TMCC Program Participant

students are provided with experience at clinical sites and then help to fill open positions at those sites when they graduate. TMCC administrators describe Project CHOICE as having lasting benefit to the TMCC community and the quality of education future students will receive. Students are grateful for Project CHOICE and the positive effect the program has had on their lives.

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Hilary Forster, Project Officer
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
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Project Director:

Michael Meit, MA, MPH
NORC at the University of Chicago
4350 East West Highway, Suite 800
Bethesda, MD 20814

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² Although the evaluation describes preliminary outcomes for program participants, we do not know what the outcomes for participants would have been in the absence of the program.

³ Enrollment and completion data is from the HPOG Performance Reporting System as of 08/22/2014 (n=198).