

HEALTHY CHILDREN HEALTHY NATIONS



Charting Pathways on Early Childhood Development and Nutrition for Minnesota's Native Children

Project Background

Rationale: A Systems Approach to Charting Pathways for Early Child Development

Research shows that high-quality early childhood education has a positive impact on children's school performance and provides the foundation for future workforce skills.

Consistent with this research, early childhood Native American language immersion programs have the potential to help children prepare for school and life as well as support efforts to increase the number of Native language speakers. Additionally, the relationships between nutrition, health and learning are undeniably strong. Research studies show that a child's early nutrition is linked to their later health and academic performance. Healthy and traditional Native foods are also a critical element of cultural preservation and revitalization in Native communities.

Unfortunately, Native American children in Minnesota are facing critical disparities in education, nutrition, health, traditional language and cultural retention, income, access to basic services and opportunities compared to any other population in the state.

If we are to turn the tide on these disparities and chart a path towards a better future for Native children, a variety of stakeholders must come together to devise an integrated systems approach in partnership with Minnesota Native communities.

Partnership: Focus on Early Childhood Development and Nutrition for Native Children in Minnesota

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC), the Center for Indian Country Development (CICD) at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, and Better Way Foundation are collaborating on the Healthy Children, Healthy Nations initiative to develop a strategic plan to improve early childhood development (ECD) and childhood nutrition in Minnesota's Native communities. Better Way Foundation and the Seeds of Native Health campaign are jointly funding this initiative, while the CICD/Minneapolis Fed will serve as a research and convening partner.

The three-way partnership will work to identify best practices and promising models in Native ECD and nutrition; determine critical needs around these issues in Native communities; and build consensus around strategies and funding recommendations to improve the well-being of Minnesota's Native children and future generations. From April-August, the project will conduct research, stakeholder interviews and a series of three convenings with Native ECD and nutrition practitioners, funders and Minnesota tribal leaders. This project will result in a final report of its findings and recommendations for next steps to strengthen Native ECD and childhood nutrition efforts in Minnesota. This report will be disseminated to all convening participants, as well as to stakeholders across Native early childhood

development, nutrition, health, language, culture and policy, tribal, state and federal government and philanthropy.

“We’re excited to be working with the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, an important benefactor of Indian Country, and Better Way Foundation, an extraordinary player in the areas of childhood philanthropy and Native education,” said Neel Kashkari, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. “The Minneapolis Fed’s track record of important research on ECD issues and the work by our Center for Indian Country Development are a perfect match for this project.”

“Native American children face larger disparities in education, health, income, and access to basic services and opportunities than any other child population in the United States,” said Ian Widmer, chair of the Better Way Foundation board of directors. “Investing in Native ECD and nutrition programs can improve cognitive development and help reverse these disturbing trends.”

About the Project Partners

Better Way Foundation

Started in 1988 by Gerald (Gerry) A. and Henrietta (Hanky) Rauenhurst, founders of the Opus companies, Better Way Foundation is focused on building a future where child well-being contributes to strong families and communities. Better Way Foundation invests in systemic, holistic, and evidence-based approaches that support the positive development of all children. Better Way Foundation supports both international and domestic partners, and has connected with exceptional leaders investing in the lives of children and strengthening their communities.

Domestically, the Rauenhurst family history in Native communities dates back to the 1970s when family members were volunteers at Red Cloud Indian School on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Since then, the family and Better Way Foundation have worked to support quality primary and secondary education for Native children around the US. The Foundation has also aimed to support efforts that revitalize and strengthen tribal culture, language programs, and curriculum.

Recently Better Way Foundation has made a new, 5-year commitment to supporting early childhood development in Indian Country. Through a partnership with Echo Hawk Consulting, BWF staff and board have gathered invaluable knowledge and begun to build promising relationships with key stakeholders and potential partners who are already making great strides in ensuring healthy beginnings for Native children in various communities throughout Indian Country.

Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Seeds of Native Health

Extreme poverty and the loss of traditional foods have caused many Native Americans to suffer from poor or inadequate diets. This has led to increased obesity, diabetes, and other profound health problems on a large scale. Experts agree that 80% of the battle in addressing these health issues is creating access to healthy food.

[Seeds of Native Health](#) is a multifaceted national campaign to improve Native American nutrition and is supported by the [Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community \(SMSC\)](#). The effort includes grant-making, sharing of best practices, capacity-building, sponsored research, and educational initiatives. The SMSC recently made a new two-year, \$5 million commitment to fund healthy nutrition for Native American children and families across Indian Country that includes a special commitment to investing in the health and nutrition of Native children in Minnesota. This raises the campaign’s funding total to \$10 million and

represents the single-largest coordinated philanthropic effort in American history focused on improving Native American nutrition.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community is a federally recognized, sovereign Indian tribe located southwest of Minneapolis/St. Paul. With a focus on being a good neighbor, good steward of the earth, and good employer, the SMSC is committed to charitable donations, community partnerships, a healthy environment, and a strong economy. Having donated more than \$325 million since opening its Gaming Enterprise in the 1990s, as well as providing more than \$500 million in economic development loans to other tribes, the SMSC is the largest philanthropic benefactor for Indian Country nationally and one of the largest charitable givers in Minnesota.

[Center for Indian Country Development of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis](#)

Mission: To help self-governing communities of American Indians attain their economic development goals.

Vision: The Center for Indian Country Development is the Federal Reserve System's:

- Thought leader and principal point of contact for Indian Country matters
- A nationally recognized clearinghouse for resources and initiatives concerning tribal economic development
- A respected contributor to the research critical to emerging economic issues that are of vital interest to Indian Country constituents and the Bank's mission.

Four Areas of Focus and Research

Land

- Support the best economic use and effective governance of land in Indian Country, balanced with cultural and traditional uses of the land.

Business and Entrepreneurship

- Advocate and develop resources for tribal and private small business and entrepreneurship growth in Native communities to support diversification and strengthening of reservation economies.

Housing and Homeownership

- Enhance a better understanding of homeownership impacts and opportunities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian individuals and communities.
- Explore synergies between federal agencies with responsibility for native housing and homeownership programs, tribal leaders, and mortgage finance institutions, including the native CDFIs, "shining a light" on successful projects and innovative tools, as well as funding gaps and bureaucratic barriers to homeownership.

Education

- Highlight effective educational and training programs for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children and adults.
- Shine a light on educational achievement and funding gaps in Indian Country as well as potential solutions.
- Explore synergies between high-quality early childhood development programs and Native language preservation initiatives.
- Analyze data on Indian Country K-12 and higher educational systems.
- Provide technical assistance to tribal colleges and tribal workforce development initiatives.