

Centering Community in Tribal Maternal Mortality Prevention

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Program Overview

Our Vision: Ensuring healthy mothers, children, and families means understanding the proximal and distal causes of maternal morbidity and mortality. For Tribes, this requires a review process that reflects the unique histories, cultures, and stories that affect maternal health. In partnership with the CDC, NIHB supports the development of Tribal Maternal Mortality Review Committees (MMRCs) to collect and evaluate maternal health data leading to prevention recommendation.

Project goal: To establish and support the development of a Tribally- led MMRC process that actively engages Tribal communities, incorporates cultural values and voices, and develops sustainable strategies to prevent maternal deaths in Indian Country.

Why? A Tribal Maternal Mortality Review process will allow Tribal nations to control the data and respond to maternal deaths as they determine appropriate. It is critical to establish a committee that can effectively develop equitable solutions across Indian Country.



November 2023, Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico



- This 2-day gathering successfully brought together 60+ maternal health experts, Tribal and federal partners, representatives from community organizations, and advocates from across the nation, including our partners from Area Indian Health Boards and Tribal Epidemiology Centers, to address the critical and complex issue of maternal mortality among AI/AN communities.
- Several key presentations, small break out group discussions, and roundtable sessions were provided to engage participants in peer-to-peer learning to help shape the future of this work.
- This format allowed attendees to learn about existing MMRCs and explore models for Tribally-led MMRCs, sharing perspectives and insights to move maternal mortality prevention work forward, including the exploration of new approaches outside the current MMRC process.

Tribal MMRC Models

POTENTIAL MODELS FOR TRIBALLY-LED MATERNAL MORTALITY REVIEW COMMITTEES

TRIBE-SPECIFIC MMRCs:

- Individual Tribes establish a MMRC and review all cases in their defined community.
- CONSIDERATIONS:**
- Empowers Tribes to serve and protect their mothers
 - Recommendations and discussions will be more relevant to each specific Tribal community
 - Exercises sovereignty
- CONS:**
- For smaller Tribes, reviews may only happen every few years due to lower case numbers making it difficult to sustain a committee
 - Lower staff numbers in smaller communities may make it difficult to sustain a committee
 - Data on maternal deaths and hospital records may be unknown or difficult to locate
 - Confidentiality of maternal deaths may be compromised in smaller communities when reviewing cases

AREA-WIDE MMRCs:

- IHS Area-wide MMRCs represented by multiple Tribes with the potential to be led and/or organized by Area Indian Health Boards.
- CONSIDERATIONS:**
- Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs) may have the data capacity to support an MMRC
 - Resources can be pooled together within an area
 - Eliminates the burden on individual Tribes
 - Ability to leverage existing relationships with Area Indian Health Boards and IHS staff to implement recommendations created from MMRC reports
 - Greater potential of impact on state policies
- CONS:**
- May take longer to establish and organize a committee
 - Accessing death certificates from the state could pose a barrier
 - Turnover in Tribal leadership may shift opinions and/or require repeated training
 - Need to coordinate with multiple state data systems

POTENTIAL MMRC MODELS

BLENDED TRIBAL/STATE MMRC MODELS:

- Utilizing established state-led MMRCs, with the addition of Tribally-led subcommittees that handle AI/AN cases.
- CONSIDERATIONS:**
- Subcommittees decide who reviews cases
 - May help foster stronger communication between Tribes and the surrounding state
 - Increased access to resources
 - Ability to build off existing MMRC infrastructure
 - Potential to include more partners
- CONS:**
- There will need to be meaningful oversight of Tribal subcommittee involvement in state-led MMRCs
 - Successful and effective collaboration may be dependent on the 'Tribal' relationship with state
 - Only 40 states currently have established MMRCs, so this option is not available across the United States

NATIONAL MMRC:

- One National, Tribally-led MMRC that would review all AI/AN maternal death cases.
- CONSIDERATIONS:**
- Larger number of cases allows the committee to meet more often
 - Possibility to engage with IHS leadership on recommendations
 - National scope for policy change
 - Increased access to resources
- CONS:**
- Unclear authority on gathering medical records and death certificates from each state
 - It could take longer to gather information on each maternal death
 - Less community participation and knowledge
 - It may be difficult to translate recommendations into actions

DISCLAIMER: These models were constructed with the input of 11 American Indian and Alaska Native Maternal Health subject matter experts during a NIHB convening on Maternal Mortality Review Committees. These thoughts do not represent all of Indian Country. The 4 models described are intended to be a starting point for conversations. There is still the possibility for other models and considerations.

- Currently, there are no Tribally-led MMRCs, and many states lack Tribal representation on existing MMRCs.
- NIHB is working to assist Tribes and Tribal organizations in exploring the possibilities of designing and implementing Tribally-led MMRCs.
- The 4 models are intended to be a starting point for conversations. There is still a possibility for other models and considerations.

Program Activities

The CDC began partnering with NIHB in 2018 to explore the development of Tribal MMRCs. Over the past year, our program has:

1. Hosted a national convening on Tribal MMRCs on the sacred lands of the Santa Ana Pueblo Tribe.
2. Presented NIHB's role in the development of Tribal MMRCs at:
 - Tribal Partners Meeting, MUM 2024
 - Tribal Maternal Health Institute, NTHC 2024
 - Tribal MMRCs Workshop, CityMatCH 2024
3. Developed the 2023 Tribal MMRC Convening Summary Report
4. The Law & Policy Considerations for Tribal MMRCs Report
5. Hosted the 3rd Annual Maternal Health Promotion Institute

Next Steps

Upcoming Events:

- 4th Annual Maternal Health Promotion Institute
 - Virtual, 3-day webinar series April 15-17
 - Featuring three Tribal Maternal Health experts supporting maternal mortality prevention initiatives
 - Highlighting community-driven health solutions for maternal health
 - Building a network of advocates for Tribal Maternal Health promotion
- 2nd Annual Convening on Tribal Maternal Mortality Prevention
 - In-person, 3-day meeting June 2-4 in Denver, CO
 - National gathering of Tribal maternal & child health experts to discuss the development of Tribal MMRCs
 - Centering maternal morbidity and mortality on prevention, resilience, and culture

Reports

2023 Convening on
Tribal MMRCs Summary
Report

Tribal MMRCs Law &
Policy Considerations
Report



Connect with us!

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