



BUILDING SOVEREIGNTY: NATIVE LEADERS ON INVESTING IN HEALTH AND SELF-DETERMINATION



Native Self-Determination

Self-determination lies at the heart of Native-led initiatives, empowering communities to govern themselves, design culturally aligned programs and address systemic inequities. It emphasizes Tribal sovereignty and autonomy in decision-making.^[1]



We know best what we need for our Tribal people. When we run into challenges, we actively engage in finding solutions—whether through legislation or partnerships. *Christine McPherson, Chief Executive Officer, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians*

For a deeper dive into how Native communities are advancing self-determination and fostering community power, explore BHPN's [For Us, By Us: Self-Determination and Community Power at the Forefront of Tribal Land Development](#).

Power of Collaboration

Partnerships between Native communities, healthcare systems, governments, and non-profits are essential for effective collaboration. Building these partnerships on a foundation of trust and shared decision-making, as exemplified by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe and Mackinac Straits Health System, led to state-of-the-art healthcare facilities that serve both Tribal and rural populations, and advance health equity.



Shared governance and relationship-building were vital for addressing healthcare gaps. True success stems not just from infrastructure but from trust, collaboration, and respect for cultural values.



Karen Cheeseman, President & CEO, Mackinac Straits Health System

BHPN's latest case study: [Mackinac Straits Hospital and St. Ignace Tribal Health Clinic, St. Ignace, MI](#) explores the nuts and bolts of how this partnership is rooted in trust, shared governance, and mutual respect.

Culturally Responsive Solutions

Solutions must reflect Native traditions, values, and healing practices while avoiding re-traumatization. Whether in housing or healthcare, culturally grounded approaches ensure inclusivity, promote healing, and foster trust.



In urban settings, partnerships like the American Indian and Alaska Native Housing Collaborative provide culturally informed solutions for housing and health inequities, ensuring Native communities are seen and empowered.

Dr. Andrea Garcia, Physician Specialist, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health

BHPN's [Empire Health Foundation Learning Session: Working Toward Culturally Responsive Housing Development](#) describes how NAYA used community engagement, art, and trauma-informed design to build culturally responsive housing for Native communities.

Innovative Investments to Systemic Challenges

There are structural barriers and inequitable funding that Native communities are addressing with creative solutions, like repurposing motels for homeless shelters and combining traditional medicine with modern healthcare systems.



Our innovative approach liberates resources for community capacity, allowing us to create systems that reflect cultural safety and healing, beyond what mainstream solutions can provide.

Dr. Andrea Garcia, Physician Specialist, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health

Native Community Development Financial Institutions are creating innovative funding models and housing solutions. Enterprise Community Partners' [The Housing Ecosystem](#) details how housing intersects with social infrastructure and community well-being.

ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAYS



FOSTER TRUST-BASED PARTNERSHIPS

- Prioritize relationships built on mutual respect and Tribal sovereignty.
- Develop long-term collaborations that go beyond single projects.



PRIORITIZE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SOLUTIONS

- Co-design programs and spaces with Native communities to align with cultural values.
- Train providers on Indigenous practices and trauma-informed approaches.



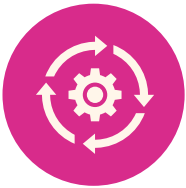
LEVERAGE MULTI-SECTOR COLLABORATION

- Combine resources across health systems, community development organizations, governments, and Tribal leaders.
- Develop joint action plans to address systemic issues like healthcare and housing and other Vital Conditions for Health and Well-being.



ADVOCATE FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

- Address funding inequities and policy barriers through coalitions and advocacy.
- Amplify Native voices in decision-making spaces.



OVERCOME DATA-SHARING CHALLENGES

- Create agreements that respect Tribal sovereignty while enabling responsible data sharing.
- Use data to highlight both assets and root causes for disparities to advocate for equitable funding.



How can multisector partnerships support Native-led initiatives that invest in health and strengthen self-determination?

Footnotes

1. To further understand the concept of Self-Determination and its implementation in Tribal communities, visit the [Division of Self-Determination Services by the Bureau of Indian Affairs \(BIA\)](#).



Build Healthy Places Network

Discover more resources at [Build Healthy Places Network](#)

The Build Healthy Places Network is a program of the Public Health Institute, Oakland, CA