

Best Practices in Culturally Sensitive End-of-Life Care

Program Profile: Zuni Home Health Care Agency

Pueblo of Zuni – Zuni Home Health Care Agency

It's respecting beliefs and abiding by them.

- Zuni Home Health Care Agency's (ZHHCA) hospice program began as the professional advisory community of the Pueblo of Zuni's initiative to meet the needs of patients with incurable diseases who did not want to be institutionalized at the end of life.
- With some support from local Indian Health Service staff, the ZHHCA secured startup funding by collaborating with the University of New Mexico's Rural Hospice Network.
- The University of New Mexico's Rural Hospice Network provided technical assistance, some financial support, and needs assessment assistance.

Successes and Innovations

- ZHHCA sought approval from Zuni Pueblo's Tribal Cultural Advisory Committee before conducting the community needs assessment to ensure it was culturally sensitive.
- Because end-of-life discussions are a taboo subject for the Zuni Pueblo, interviewers used the past tense and indirect phrasing to be culturally sensitive. To conduct the assessment, they met with families who had recently lost loved ones and discussed how their care needs had been met.
- ZHHCA's advisory committee continually discusses palliative and hospice services to address quality of care. Questions include, "Where is the need?" "How are we doing?" "Where and what can we improve?" "What are the conditions and care needs of our current patients?"
- The program assures ongoing education, training, and innovation by participating in the New Mexico Home and Hospice Care Association.

Operated by: Pueblo of Zuni

Established: 1997

Location: Zuni, New Mexico

Area served: Zuni Home Health Care Agency serves members of the Zuni Pueblo, located 150 miles west of Albuquerque, and encompasses McKinley and Cibola Counties.

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Mission: Our staff is dedicated to holistic health. The client's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being are of prime importance to the staff. The care is individualized and consistent.



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Incorporating Culture

- The ZHHCA needs assessment found that information about end-of-life is best presented while family is around to provide support.
- ZHHCA further found that using respectful and carefully chosen language to inform individuals and family of their options is critical to assuring access to services.
- At ZHHCA, community members educate physicians about patients' and families' end-of-life cultural views.
- ZHHCA palliative care services, such as case management and an on-call clinical staff, are personalized to individual needs, and ZHHCA quickly identifies and finds resources to meet those needs.

“That’s always been in the back of my mind—what we can do, how can it be done, what’s available to help our people remain at home?”

-Theresa Bowannie, Zuni Home Health Care Agency, Administrator

Administration, Staffing & Facility

ZHHCA’s palliative and hospice staff includes a registered nurse and a home health aide who serve 12 to 15 patients. Mostly Native American, 85% of the staff are from the Zuni Pueblo and some are from Navajo Nation. The staff actively participate in trainings on sensitivity to cultural values and end-of-life health and care issues, alongside trainings by the state of New Mexico and the Hospice Care Association.

Funding

- ZHHCA is Medicare- and Medicaid-certified, but the hospice program is not Medicare Hospice-certified due to cultural concerns surrounding the “6-month status” for participants.
- ZHHCA’s indigent and hospice fund is for patients who lack coverage or cannot afford services.
- ZHHCA bills palliative care services through patients’ Medicare and Medicaid plans.

Lessons Learned

- ZHHCA recommends developing active tribal government relationships by keeping them informed and involving them in the program through home visits or other activities.
- A key to ZHHCA’s success is their dedicated and hard-working staff.
- ZHHCA affirms that, because of varying cultural beliefs, it is important to listen to patients and families and learn from the community members before making or suggesting plans for care.

Future Directions

ZHHCA’s expansion plans include a larger service area and a respite care unit.