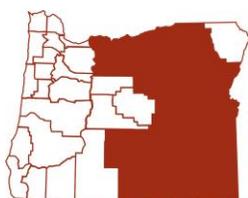


Modernizing Public Health: Stories from the Field

Eastern Oregon Modernization Collaborative



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Collaborative kicks sexually transmitted disease reduction efforts into high gear

For two years, Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center distributed condoms and educational materials at the Indian Village—a teepee encampment set up during Pendleton Round-Up week in September—using resources from the national GYT: Get Yourself Tested. The campaign is a youth-focused, empowering social movement that encourages young people to get tested and treated, as needed, for sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

So when staff members at Yellowhawk, which serves the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, learned about a \$495,000 grant the Eastern Oregon Modernization Collaborative received as part of the Oregon Legislature's 2017 Public Health Modernization investment, they saw an opportunity to kick their campaign into overdrive.

"With the (modernization) grant, it made condom access a lot easier," said Natasha Herrera, community health representative at Yellowhawk.

There now are condom distribution boxes placed throughout Yellowhawk—each holding 125 condoms—including the consult rooms at the pharmacy, six medical exam rooms, the behavioral health patient access restrooms and four other public access restrooms. A total of 3,600 condoms have been distributed as of December, including 1,600 at the 2018 Pendleton Round-Up, and public restrooms at Mission Market, located on the reservation, have continued to be restocked by Herrera since the effort started in July.

"Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center wants to empower people to take care of themselves and this is providing the perfect opportunity to do just that," she said.

Health officials at the Eastern Oregon Modernization Collaborative, which covers 13 rural counties encompassing almost the entire eastern half of the state, are hoping the effort curbs an upward trend in STD incidence, which increased dramatically in the region between 2012 and 2017: 32 percent for chlamydia, 192 percent for gonorrhea and 950 percent for syphilis.

Nora Zimmerman, regional systems liaison for the Eastern Oregon Modernization Collaborative, says "As a partner on the regional public health modernization project, Yellowhawk's commitment to true community engagement is inspiring."

The project has run in tandem with another effort funded by the modernization grant to offer trainings—in partnership with the Mountain West AIDS Education and Training Center at the



University of Washington and the Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living in Ontario—to health care providers around the region on STD/HIV screening and treatment standards.

The Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living stocks condoms at sites in Pendleton as well, including Great Pacific Wine and Coffee Co. Zimmerman said, “Business owners in Pendleton have been awesome to work with. Without their commitment to community health, this increased access to free condoms to prevent the spread of STIs would not be possible in Pendleton.”

The grant to the Eastern Oregon Modernization Collaborative has also supported training on *Passport to Partner Services*, a national curriculum developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention and Division of STD Prevention, for all local public health and tribal health center staffs in EOMC’s service area. The program includes training for disease intervention specialists and other partner services providers, including medical providers, on such topics as describing partner services to patients; conducting field investigations; and developing skills for interviewing STD and HIV patients to identify sex partners and social contacts for referral to medical evaluation.

In addition, the collaborative is developing a texting and email protocol aimed at improving sexual partner notification when individuals who test positive for STD believe they’ve exposed others to their infections.

“Communicable disease investigators can utilize social media apps and online dating sites, as well as text and email to notify sexual or needle-sharing partners of possible exposure,” said Callie Lamendola-Gilliam, regional epidemiologist for EOMC. “Experienced STI programs have found that email and texting is an effective means of reaching people when phone calls just aren’t working.”

And if Eastern Oregon ever has an outbreak of an STI, or any communicable disease for that matter, Lamendola-Gilliam is there to help—thanks to the modernization grant.

“What I’ve been able to provide is back-up support,” said Lamendola-Gilliam. “A lot of the counties out here are fairly small. They don’t necessarily need a bunch of full-time staff, so you might have one nurse doing three jobs. They can’t just take two weeks off and not look at the case load that might be coming in. If an outbreak happens, or they just need to take some much-deserved time off, I am able to step in and provide that back-up support.”

Herrera and her colleagues at Yellowhawk hope their prevention efforts will help stave off such a scenario, particularly one involving an STI. Mystie Haynie, communicable disease nurse at Yellowhawk, believes their condom distribution project is working.

“We’ve started getting walk-ins asking for me, saying ‘Hey, I need to get tested, I need to talk to you about this.’ That shows me our outreach is doing its job,” Haynie said.

Carrie Sampson, community wellness director at Yellowhawk, says the partnership between Yellowhawk and the counties is helping spotlight the tribes’ contribution to the region’s STI reduction efforts. “I hope we can play a stronger role in addressing the increase in STIs in our

community. Since this is priority for the modernization collaborative, I see it as a benefit that we can work together to bring education to our community.”