Medical-Legal Partnerships in Indian Country
Health Disparities in Indian Country

- Mortality Rates for American Indian/ Alaska Natives (AI/AN)
  - Diabetes 182% higher
  - Pneumonia/ Influenza 37% higher
  - Maternal Death at Childbirth 50% higher
  - Alcoholism 552% higher
  - Unintentional Injury 138% higher
  - Homicide 83% higher
  - Suicide 74% higher

- Tuberculosis rates between 2003 – 2008 for AI/AN were FIVE times higher than in the non-Hispanic white population.

- AI/AN suffer from severe psychological distress as a rate 1.5 times higher than the general population.
Socioeconomic Conditions in Indian Country

• One in four AI/AN persons live below the federal poverty line.

• On reservations, one in four live below 75% of the poverty line.

• Unemployment rate for AI/AN is double that of the U.S. population; as high as 50% on some rural, reservations.

• AI/AN youth are 1/2 as likely to obtain a bachelor’s degree.

• Reservations have overcrowding at 6 times the national rate.

• On the Navajo Nation, 1/3 of families live in homes without indoor plumbing. 20% of homes lack electricity.
Persistent poverty counties -- 20 percent or more residents were poor as measured by each of the last four censuses, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000.

Source: Economic Research Service, USDA.
Resource Access in Indian Country

Sparse, scattered population.

Long travel distances, dirt roads.
Overview of Medical-Legal Partnership

- Trainings for Health Providers on Legal Issues Impacting the Low-Income Patient Population
- Referrals from Health Providers to Legal Team
- Ongoing Consultation with Health Providers
- Tracking of Outcomes
Diné Bí ts’íí báá Ah’jiteí (DBA) Program
Program for the Health of the People

A Medical-Legal Partnership Between:

Navajo Area Indian Health Service – Shiprock Service Unit

DNA – People’s Legal Services, Inc.

Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation
(§ 638 Tribal Self-Directed Facility)
DBA Program – Legal Team

Project Director
• Matt VanWormer, JD - Shiprock

Staff Attorneys
• Sovereign Hager, JD – Shiprock
• Alicia Merschen-Perez, JD – Tuba City

Support Staff
• Steven Shirley – Shiprock

DBA Program – Medical Champions

• In Shiprock, transition of providers creates shift in medical support.

• In Tuba City, early leadership from medical champion Diana Hu, MD (Maternal Health/ Pediatrics) was essential to startup of MLP.
DBA Program – Shiprock Service Unit

• Collaborative Agreement with Navajo Area Indian Health Service (NAIHS) in May 2009.

• Referrals from Family Medicine, Pediatrics, Internal Medicine, Mental Health, Medical Social Workers, Nurse Case Managers, Public Health Nursing Dept., and Benefits Coordinators.

• Currently: No On-Site Presence at NNMC; On-Site Visits to Satellite Facilities (Dzilth-Na-O-Dith-Hle and Red Mesa).

• **Statistics from One-Year Period (11/01/11 – 10/31/12):**
  
  – 248 referrals, resulting in 195 legal intakes;
  – 152 patients received direct legal assistance (cases resolved);
  – Over 500 people helped, including household/family members;
  – 75 medical providers trained to spot legal issues; and
  – 43 medical providers referring cases to DBA.
Behavioral Health - Case Example No. 1

- 62-Year-Old Navajo Female, Diagnosed Anxiety Disorder
- Residing in Public Housing on the Navajo Nation
- Anxiety Symptoms Leading Patient to Make Multiple Calls to Law Enforcement
- At Risk of Eviction, Homelessness
Behavioral Health - Case Example No. 1

- 62-Year-Old Navajo Female, Severe Anxiety Disorder
- Residing in Public Housing on the Navajo Nation
- Anxiety Symptoms Leading Patient to Make Multiple Calls to Law Enforcement
- At Risk of Eviction, Homelessness
Behavioral Health - Case Example No. 2

• 30-Year-Old Male with Severe Depression, Alcoholism

• Multiple Denials for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

• No Ability to Afford Off-Reservation Mental Health Services

• High Risk of Suicide

• Costly Emergency Room Hospitalizations
Behavioral Health - Case Example No. 3

- 24-Year-Old Female with History of Traumatic Brain Injury
- Pattern of Self-Injurious Behavior, Extreme Self-Neglect
- Failed Attempts to Secure a Residential Placement for Patient
- Barriers to Accessing Public Benefits and Health Insurance
- Important Decision-Making Issues
DBA Program – Shiprock Outcomes

**Financial:**
- Increased income or resources for 42 families.
- $190,854.52 in monetary benefits for patient/clients;
- New monthly benefits totaling $18,955.05 (avg. of $526.53 per mo.);
- Removed $18,308.84 in unlawful/unwarranted debt.

**Non-Financial:**
- New/additional health care coverage 24 families
- Medical decision-making (POA, guardianship) 19 adults
- Safe and affordable housing 15 families
- Domestic Abuse Protection Orders 10 victims
- Increase Special Edu. Services 5 children

**Unduplicated Service**

**Outreach to Vulnerable AI/AN Sub-Populations**
DBA Program - Shiprock Outcomes

DBA assistance by legal matter

- Disability (adult SSI/SDI), 38%
- Food stamps / Medicaid / Utilities, 17%
- Housing, 11%
- SSI (children), 10%
- Guardianships, 8%
- Abuse & Violence, 8%
- Special education, 8%
Potential for Expansion!

• Proven success with startup and operation of reservation-based medical-legal partnerships on the Navajo Nation.

• Significant overlap in legal services providers (NAILS) and Indian Health Services locations.

• Interested stakeholders in other regions.