

Reimbursing Traditional Health Care Services to Beneficiaries of Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal 638 facilities

SUMMARY

On October 16, 2024, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) approved the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment's (AHCCCS) 1115 waiver request to reimburse traditional healing services provided in or through Tribal 638 and Indian Health Services (IHS) facilities. These services are to be eligible to all Tribal 638 and IHS beneficiaries, including non-natives.

BACKGROUND

Beginning in 2015, a Traditional Healing (TH) Workgroup consisting of tribal 638 and IHS facilities, urban Indian programs, traditional practitioners, and other stakeholders, came together to develop a waiver which sought to reimburse for traditional healing services provided by Tribal and 638 facilities. The waiver leveraged the 100% Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage (FMAP) that IHS and 638 facilities receive.

MEDICAID FMAP OVERVIEW

The Medicaid program is a state-federal partnership and costs are divided by the state and federal government. The FMAP determines the percentage the federal government will cover and the remaining percentage is picked up by the states. Arizona (AZ)'s FMAP is **64.89%** for the general Medicaid population. The state contributes **35.11%**.

In addition to AZ's FMAP, there is a FMAP for Tribal and IHS health care facilities. In all states, services provided to Medicaid-eligible individuals at these facilities can be reimbursed at **100% FMAP** and it is budget neutral for AZ. In addition to providing health care and TH services to American Indian/Alaskan Natives (AI/AN), Tribal 638 and IHS facilities provide care to a small percentage of non-AI/AN beneficiaries whose Medicaid costs are at the State FMAP.

The estimated cost provided by AHCCCS is \$1.32M and is needed to operationalize the waiver.

Traditional Healing Workgroup Infrastructure

- The Traditional Health Workgroup recognized the essential importance of an oversight for the Traditional Practitioner Reimbursement Implementation Process. The oversight will include endorsed by a Qualifying Entity such as a Hospital Board, Medical Executive Committee, Traditional Healing Program Director or Facility designated entity with Tribal Acknowledgement such as a Tribal Leader, Tribal Traditional Healer and Tribal Traditional
- Each IHS Healthcare Facilities and 638 Tribal Healthcare Facilities will determine their own infrastructure process to ensure compliance.
- Reimbursable Services: A cross walk of services was created that matched traditional practitioners services with AHCCCS reimbursable services. Services were determined by the facility with input by their employed traditional healers

SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL HEALING

Since time immemorial, TH has been a part of our healing, recovery, and wellness in tribal cultures throughout the world and AZ. For AI/ANs traditional healing encompasses a holistic approach to our physical health and well being. This holistic approach acknowledges the elements of mind, body, community and spiritual interconnectedness that contributes to our overall physical nature. The practice of TH incorporates a combination of holistic approaches that use variations of song, dance, physical manipulation, traditional diets and natural plant-based medicines specifically designed to address physical and mental issues of the individual. This healing synergy is what is responsible for the resilience of Indigenous people centuries before European contact.

In AZ there are 22- federally recognized Tribes who still live to this day by their traditional cultural ways, as well practicing traditional healing for their communities as a way of maintaining harmony, the overall health, treatment for alignments, and emotional recovery from traumatic experiences. The integration of traditional healing practices into Medicaid is not just a policy change; it is a recognition of the value of tribal cultures and traditions. Incorporating traditional Native health into

state systems and non-tribal health care systems demonstrates that AZ recognizes the importance of Indigenous traditions.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

A growing body of research highlights the effectiveness of traditional healing practices, particularly in Indigenous communities, where they are integral to physical and mental well-being. Studies show that traditional healing methods are used often in collaboration with Western medical treatments. This integrated approach is particularly beneficial for addressing various health issues. For example, Abbott (1998) notes that many AI/ANs continue to use traditional healing practices, such as sweat lodges, talking circles, and cultural enhancement programs, in the treatment of alcohol-related problems. The integration of these methods with Western approaches like medication and Alcoholics Anonymous has been effective for addressing addiction, with evidence suggesting that these traditional practices offer unique benefits in supporting the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals (Abbott, 1998).

Additionally, research into traditional healing for mental health also supports its effectiveness. Nortje et al. (2016) demonstrate that traditional healers play a crucial role in treating mental health disorders, particularly in areas where formal psychiatric services are unavailable. Traditional healers are shown to provide psychosocial interventions that help relieve distress and improve symptoms of common mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Lastly, Shrestha et al. (2023) emphasized that traditional healers are valuable contributors to dementia care. The study identifies the role of traditional healers in the assessment, diagnosis, and care of dementia, particularly in First Nations communities, where healers collaborate with healthcare professionals to provide a more holistic approach to dementia care. This collaboration between traditional and Western medicine can help ensure that all aspects of a patient's well-being are addressed (Shrestha et al., 2024).

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