

Culture is medicine. People are medicine.

Category: Research

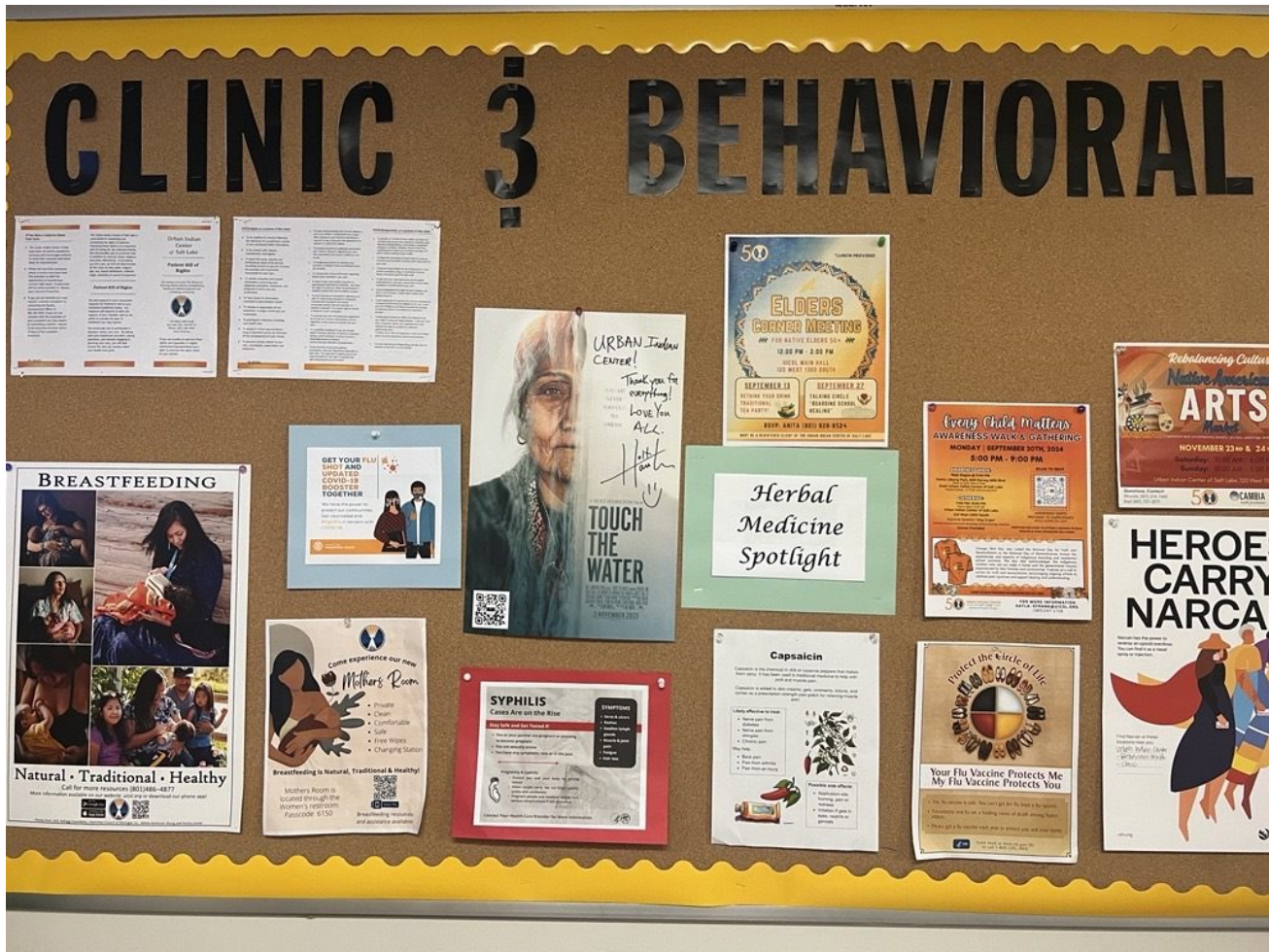
written by Nahla Holland | December 3, 2024



Front entrance to the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake in Salt Lake City, Utah.

About the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake

Established in 1974, the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake (UICSL) provides care for the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities in the greater Salt Lake City area. Their extensive list of services includes medical, behavioral health, social, and Traditional Healing programming. Demonstrated throughout the programming at UICSL, community and cultural connections are focal points for wellness and healing. The strength found in cultural identity, and the bonds people create with each other are fundamental aspects of these programs and within Indigenous concepts of health.



Clinic and behavioral programs notice board highlighting different events and resources for UICSL patients.

Kristie, a registered dietitian, and Allyson, a therapist, presented on UICSL’s Traditional Healing programming with NCUIH at the Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP) conference in the summer of 2024.

Given that the Salt Lake City AI/AN community consists of members from many different Tribes, UICSL consciously allows everyone to practice their specific traditions and does not enforce the practice of any one tradition. For instance, some patients are court-mandated to attend UICSL

programs who may or may not be comfortable practicing another Tribe's tradition or customs. UICSL is mindful of making space for people to receive care in a method best suited for their background and comfort.

Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) Activities:

UICSL's Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) incorporates standard medical interventions, nutrition, and traditional practices to best treat the patient, their community, and their needs.



A drum from the Calling Back Our Spirit workshop (Photo credit: UICSL).

The UICSL fitness program "In the Steps of Our Ancestors" is a running and walking group for all ages and all levels that runs regularly at the SLC Olympic Oval, rain or shine, as part of their SDPI program activities. This running group helps improve fitness and enhances participants' social bonds and community connections. Participants might start barely able to finish one lap around the track but eventually, over time, go on to complete 5k races. The running groups create a sense of camaraderie where participants push each other to finish and cheer them on. Outside of the "In the Steps of Our Ancestors" group, UICSL offers an on-site gym with a physical trainer on staff. They conduct gym sessions and other exercise activities like All Nations Yoga in the park, archery, Zumba, Fitness Thursdays with an Indigenous focus, etc.

UICSL also offers cooking classes under SDPI to highlight the benefits and increase the consumption of more Traditional Foods. UICSL staff stress the importance of mindset when harvesting, preparing, and cooking with their patients so that the best intentions go into preparing nourishing meals. These cooking demonstrations happen on-site in the UICSL kitchen, and the produce is often sourced from

a nearby community garden. UICSL partners with chefs from various Tribes, allowing for a multi-Tribal approach. These partnerships allow greater freedom for UICSL, the chef, and the participants in what is considered Traditional Foods and create a broader representation of cultural and Tribal traditions for the over 250 cooking class participants.

Overall, food is a focal point for the community at UICSL. They often hold highly attended feasts for their community and recently initiated a food voucher program, providing pre-loaded grocery cards to patients to alleviate some financial hurdles around regularly accessing healthy produce.

Other Traditional Healing Programs:



A ribbon tote bag created during the Reaching Out to Relatives support group (Photo credit: UICSL).

While many Traditional Healing programs fall under the SDPI umbrella, UICSL offers a variety of other programming that incorporates Traditional Healing to help address issues within the community. “Calling Back Our Spirit” utilizes the story of the drum and the traditions of drum making, drumming, and music to support intensive or general outpatient treatment for individuals with substance use disorder. The “Reaching out to Relatives” program illustrates the importance of connecting with oneself, one’s community, and cultural identity to promote mental health and larger healing. The community mental health support group teaches participants traditional crafts and the history behind their creations. The Medicine Pouch program is a community workshop for participants to learn more about traditional medicines and traditional wellness practices to utilize in their own lives. Participants craft medicine pouches and focus on creating positive experiences and maintaining balance throughout their lives through Indigenous frameworks.

Modern popular activities that promote happiness and wellness, such as gratitude, journaling, exercise, acts of kindness, and meditation, embody fundamental aspects of Indigenous views of health and wellness. UICSL helps promote these Indigenous practices through their programming to strengthen their community. For example,

- Gratitude → offerings, ceremonies
- Journaling → art, jewelry, songs
- Exercise → dance
- Acts of kindness → giveaways, gifting
- Meditation → sweat lodge, prayer

In September 2024, UICSL celebrated its 50th anniversary by opening the doors to its new site in Murray, Utah, expanding its available services for patients! Future plans for UICSL include expanding its food prescription program, expanding staff, developing a nearby empty lot into a community garden, and opening an on-site pharmacy. For more information on UICSL, please visit <https://uicsl.org/>.

To see slides from the presentation, click [here](#).



NCUIH and UICSL after their AAIP presentation. From left to right: Allyson Shaw, LCSW (UICSL), Kristie Hinton, R.D. (UICSL), Ryan Ward, MPH (UICSL), Nahla Holland (NCUIH), Alexandra Payan, J.D. (NCUIH).