



### Mission

To alleviate the unequal burden of cancer among Native Americans of the Southwest through research, training, and community outreach programs in collaboration with the communities we serve.

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The Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP) is a partnership of Native American communities, Northern Arizona University, the University of Arizona Cancer Center, and the National Cancer Institute to address cancer health disparities in Native Americans.

## Greetings!

We hope that you all had an enjoyable and safe Labor Day holiday. The holiday reminds us to acknowledge everyone who is working to achieve NACP's goals. We thank you for your effort and commitment. May this issue bring you new insights into the results of that work.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Jani Ingram

Margaret Briebl

Francine Gachupin

## Dr. Juanita Merchant Wins Mentorship Award



Dr. Juanita Merchant

Our congratulations go out to Juanita Merchant, MD, PhD, who is part of the healthy stomach research project team. Dr. Merchant has received the 2020 Distinguished Mentor Award from the American Gastroenterological Association. This award honors one individual a year for achievements as an outstanding mentor over a lifelong career. Dr. Merchant has mentored trainees at all levels while advancing our understanding of the responses of the stomach or colon to chronic inflammation, which can lead to gastric or colon cancer.

## Cancer Health Disparity Course

The Cancer Health Disparity course started as a repository for NACP resources among both the NAU and UA campuses, with intentions to develop learning modules from these resources. After gathering the necessary information, the course was developed into a training course for incoming student researchers. The course was created using an online learning environment and the development was spearheaded by **Jennifer Hudson** and **Janet Yellowhair**, NACP student researchers. They had insight into the best practices and resources for burgeoning student researchers. Overall, it was a collaborative effort between both NAU and UA campuses.

The course currently has an introduction with an overview of the NACP, followed by 6 learning modules: Module 1: Cancer 101, Module 2: Research with Tribal Nations, Module 3: Career Development, Module 4: Cultural Sensitivity with Regard to Research, Module 5: CURE Pipeline (grant writing and pre-doctoral applications), and Module 6: Community Dissemination. All materials are introduced or placed in the context of Tribal cancer disparities and research with Tribal Nations.

Expansion to include faculty training content such as modules on best mentoring practices will be explored. We will continue to support the mission of the Research Education Core to empower these students to return to their communities as leaders.



## Healthy Stomach Project Paper Published

Stomach cancer (also known as gastric cancer) is the 3rd leading cause of cancer death globally. In Arizona, stomach cancer rates are 3-4 times higher among the Navajo Nation population compared to the non-Hispanic white population. Long-term infection of the stomach with a bacteria called *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) can cause ulcers, chronic inflammation, and in some cases, stomach cancer. It is not fully clear how *H. pylori* is spread, but there is general agreement that it is commonly spread from person-to-person through saliva and orally through fecal contamination of food and water. In 2017, the Navajo Healthy Stomach Project (NHSP) team conducted small group discussions in three Navajo communities to assess Navajo adults' understanding and awareness of *H. pylori* and stomach cancer.

In July 2020, **Carmenlita Chief**, MPH, (Northern Arizona University), along with **Drs. Priscilla Sanderson** (NAU), Angela A.A. Willeto (NAU), Fernando Monroy (NAU), **Robin Harris** (University of Arizona) and Eyal Oren (San Diego State University) published the findings in the *Journal of Cancer Education*. In “*Nobody is Talking About It: Diné (Navajo) Communities Speak About Stomach Cancer and Helicobacter pylori Infections*,” the team reported limited knowledge on these conditions among participants. The discussion groups described poor health care experiences, structural inequities and environmental concerns, and associated these with *H. pylori* and stomach cancer. An example of a structural inequity that participants identified is how much more common it is for community members on the Navajo Nation to experience difficulty getting access to safe drinking water or fresh and nutritious foods than it is for people living in communities outside of the Navajo Nation.

The published study received immediate attention from gastric cancer experts at the federal level, Dr. Maria Constanza Camargo (National Cancer Institute) and Dr. Michael Bruce (Centers for Disease Control). Dr. Bruce works closely with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and shared a report from a recent symposium of community members and cancer experts which focused on evaluating existing data, identifying knowledge gaps and summarizing actions that could improve stomach cancer diagnosis and survival. Here in Arizona, the NHSP team is continuing their work to understand the impact of *H. pylori* and barriers to diagnosis and treatment of stomach cancer on Navajo Nation.



**Members of the Navajo Healthy Stomach Project**  
**Back row (L-R): Dr. Priscilla Sanderson (NAU), Dr. Robin Harris (UA), Dr. Heidi Brown (UA), and Carmenlita Chief (NAU).**  
**Front row (L-R): Breanna Lameman (UA student) and Darien Fuller (UA student).**



# Cancer Screening Education for Native American Women with Disabilities

Compared to women without disabilities, women with disabilities are less likely to get recommended screenings for breast and cervical cancer. To address this disparity, partners at NAU (**Heather Williamson, Julie Baldwin**, and Marissa Adams), the UA (**Julie Armin** and Janet Rothers), HOPI Cancer Support Services (Dana Russell), and Tucson Indian Center (Phoebe Cager and Veronica Boone) are working to create an educational program for women with disabilities.

Dana Russell, Manager of HOPI Cancer Support Services (HCSS) stated “HOPI Cancer Support Services is all about cancer, i.e. the importance of education, helping clients navigate an often complicated and confusing system and providing help to an underserved population in need. Identifying the needs of the developmentally disabled population and providing services falls right in line with our capabilities and mission.” Phoebe Cager, Tucson Indian Center Wellness Director stated “Cultural identity is a core value of the Tucson Indian Center and is central to the services we deliver, so we are very pleased to partner with The University of Arizona Cancer Center, Northern Arizona University, and HCSS to design a culturally relevant, evidence-based cancer screening education program to improve the health and cancer screenings of American Indian women with disabilities. Strengthening the cultural relevancy of this education will contribute to elevating the health of our community and others.”



To date the team has interviewed women with disabilities, caregivers, and providers about barriers and facilitators to getting breast and cervical cancer screenings. Results of these interviews are being used to culturally adapt an existing evidence-based breast and cervical cancer screening education program for women with disabilities. Currently, the content and format for the adapted curriculum are being discussed in small groups with stakeholders and the program will be launched in spring 2021. Also contributing to the project are a team of undergraduate and graduate students from NAU and UA. They come from the fields of public health, anthropology, health sciences, and occupational therapy. Many students working on the project have gone on to graduate programs, such as public health or indigenous health, and have participated in dissemination activities, such as conference presentations or publications.

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