

AOSW 2026



Annual Conference

June 10-12, 2026

Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront
Portland, Oregon USA

Pre-Conferences: June 9, 2026

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Walking Together:

How Relationship and Mutual Learning Guided Psychosocial Program Adaptation with Navajo Communities at the House of Hope



Tuba City
Regional Health Care Corporation

*Photo credit: Albert Dancel/TCRHCC
Communications Department*

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Meet the Speakers

Kelly Hendershot
LGSW, LMSW

VP, Network &
Healthcare
Partnerships

Cancer Support
Community



Tanya "T.J." Riggs
BSHS, MAdm

Oncology Services
Program Director

Tuba City Regional
Health Care
Corporation



Learning Objectives

1

Participants will be able to describe the specific elements that support effective cultural adaptation of psychosocial interventions in Indigenous communities, including honoring cultural protocols and sensitivity, integrating community concepts of healing, and modifying program structures to align with traditional values and practices.



Photo credit: Albert Dancel/TCRHCC
Communications Department



Learning Objectives

2

Participants will understand how trust, reciprocity, and shared decision-making shape the success of partnerships between external organizations and Navajo collaborators. They will be able to articulate how relational factors impact communication processes, project pacing, and the ability to resolve challenges collaboratively.



Photo credit: Albert Dancel/TCRHCC
Communications Department



Learning Objectives

3

Participants will gain practical strategies for approaching Indigenous and other culturally distinct partners with humility, openness, and respect. They will be able to envision how these principles can inform their own efforts to co-create programs, adapt interventions, or engage in community-driven initiatives.



Grounded in the Navajo Nation

New Cancer Diagnoses for Tuba City Service Area Residents, 2021-2023



Source: TCRHCC Electronic Health Record

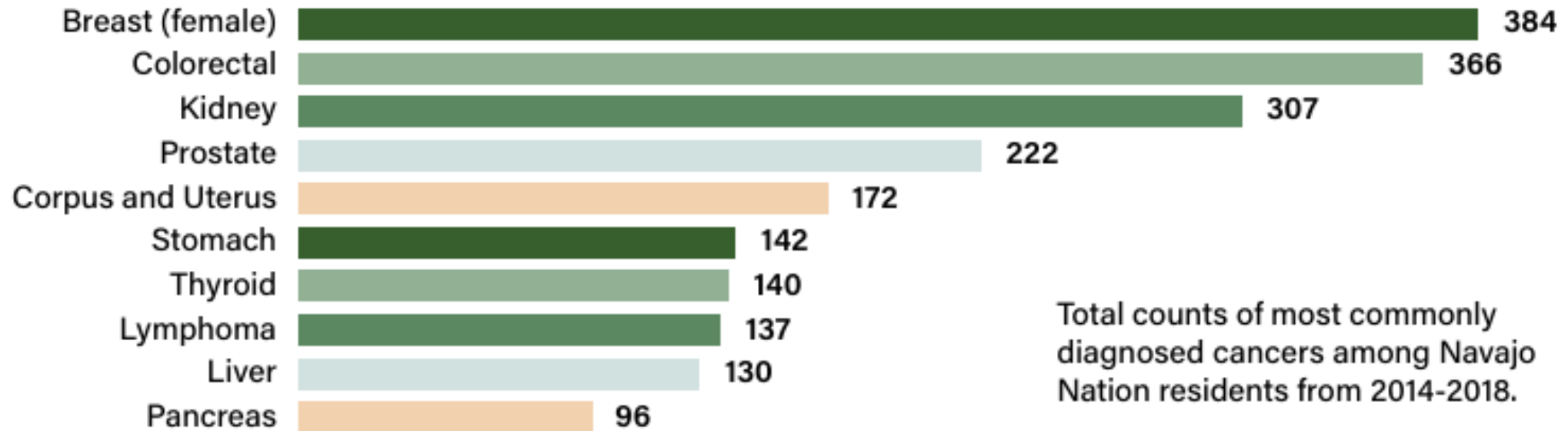
Includes patients:

- Living in Tuba City Service Area
- Had a TCRHCC visit in 2021-2023
- Newly diagnosed with cancer regardless of where treated
- All ages

281 patients living in Tuba City Service Area were diagnosed with cancer between 2021-2023.

Grounded in the Navajo Nation

Top 10 Cancers Most Commonly Diagnosed Among Navajo, 2014-2018¹⁵



Total counts of most commonly diagnosed cancers among Navajo Nation residents from 2014-2018.

Source: Navajo Epidemiology Center, Cancer Among the Navajo 2014 - 2018

Epidemiologic Overview

- Geographic isolation and access barriers
- Digital inequity and limited broadband availability

Cancer Rates by cancer type for Navajo and non-Hispanic White people



Barriers Across the Cancer Care Continuum

- Late-stage diagnosis and increased cancer mortality
- Under-resourced rural and tribal health systems
- Insurance gaps and limited oncology infrastructure
- Historical trauma and systemic medical mistrust



Psychosocial Equity in Oncology: Practice Gaps and Framework Limitations

- Psychosocial care is **essential to quality cancer care**, not ancillary
- Oncology social work contributes to **clinical outcomes and patient engagement**
- **Inequitable access** to psychosocial services persists across populations
- Dominant psycho-oncology models reflect **Western cultural assumptions**
- Emphasis on **individual coping and direct communication** as clinical norms
- These models often **misalign with Indigenous, relational, and holistic approaches to health**

Partnership Development and Shared Vision



Oncology Care in Indian Country

A Landmark Initiative



Tuba City
Regional Health Care Corporation

Trust-Building in Cross-Cultural Collaboration

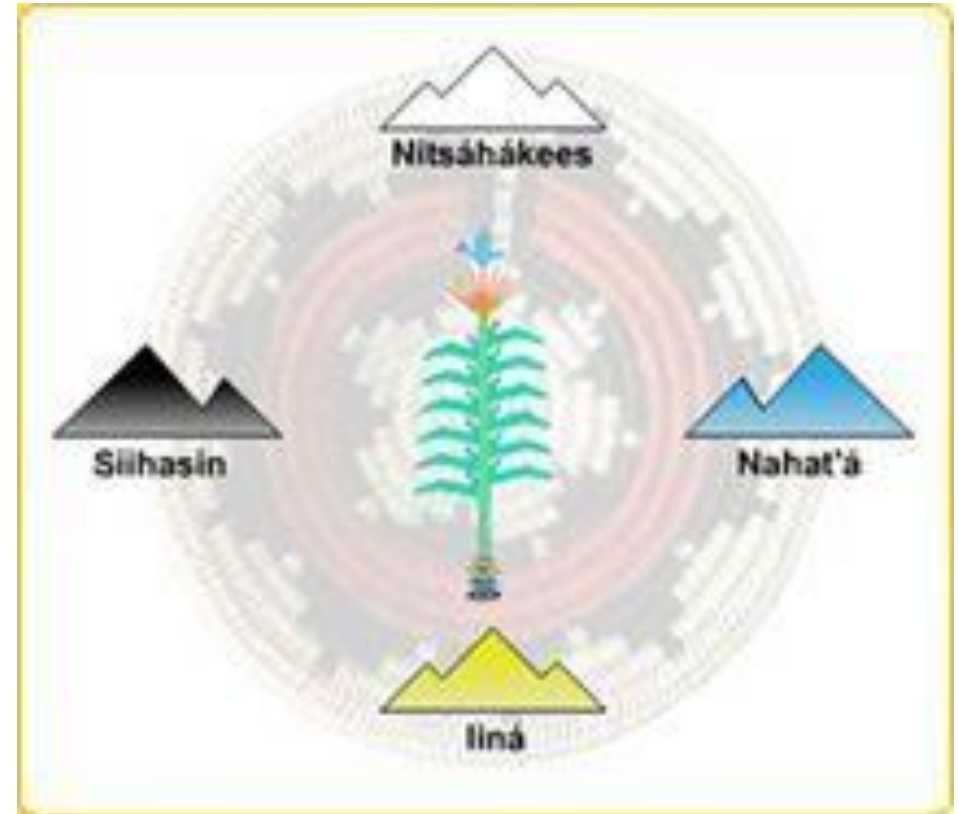
- Listening sessions and sustained physical presence
- Informal relationship-building practices
- Transparency regarding goals, timelines, and limitations
- Respect for tribal sovereignty and self-determination



Trust, Reciprocity, and Shared Decision-Making

Relational dynamics and partnership success:

- Mutual learning versus expert-driven approaches
- Project pacing aligned with community readiness
- Collaborative navigation of challenges and constraints



Trust as a Mechanism in Program Development

- Co-examination of assumptions
- Joint definition of relevance and success
- Alignment of communication norms and expectations
- Relationship sustainability as a clinical and ethical foundation



Janice Whiterock, BS, MHA

CSC Program Manager - Oncology Department
Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation

Frankly Speaking About Cancer: Understanding Colorectal Cancer

- Identification of colorectal cancer education needs
- Limitations of existing educational materials
- Rationale for an interactive, clinic-based educational approach



Community-Guided Design and Development Process

Listening Session:

- Engagement of Navajo clinicians, staff, and community members
- Guidance from cultural advisors
- Collaboration with a locally recommended photographer, Alyssa Peaches Armendez
- Iterative revisions informed by community feedback

Have you or a loved one experienced a colorectal cancer diagnosis?

Would you be interested in participating in a listening session to help develop a new interactive resource PowerPoint to support those experiencing cancer? Join us on Wednesday, March 5 at 11:00am, at the Moenkopi Legacy Inn & Suites. **For more information, call (928)-283-2131.**





Cancer Support Community

8,082 followers

1d • 🌐

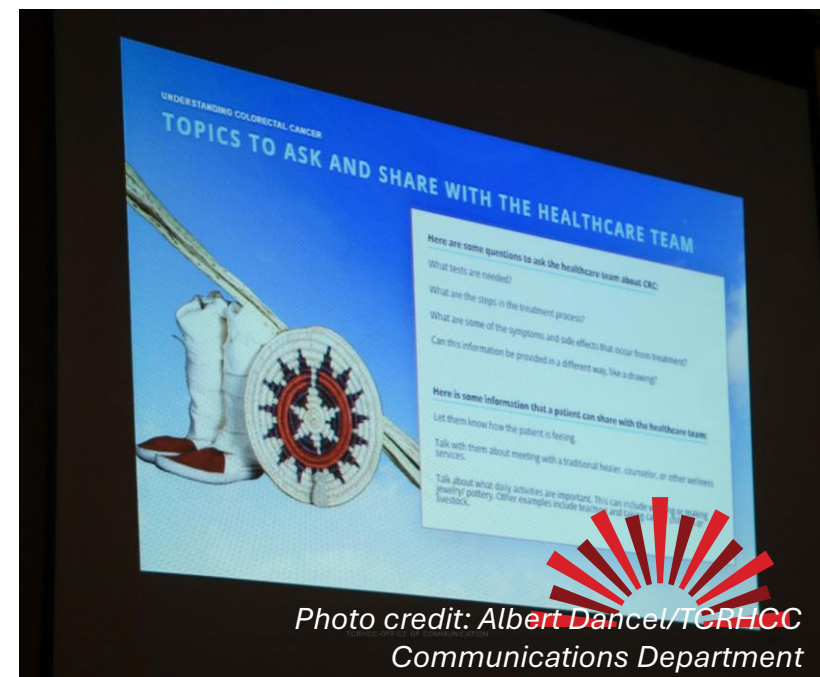
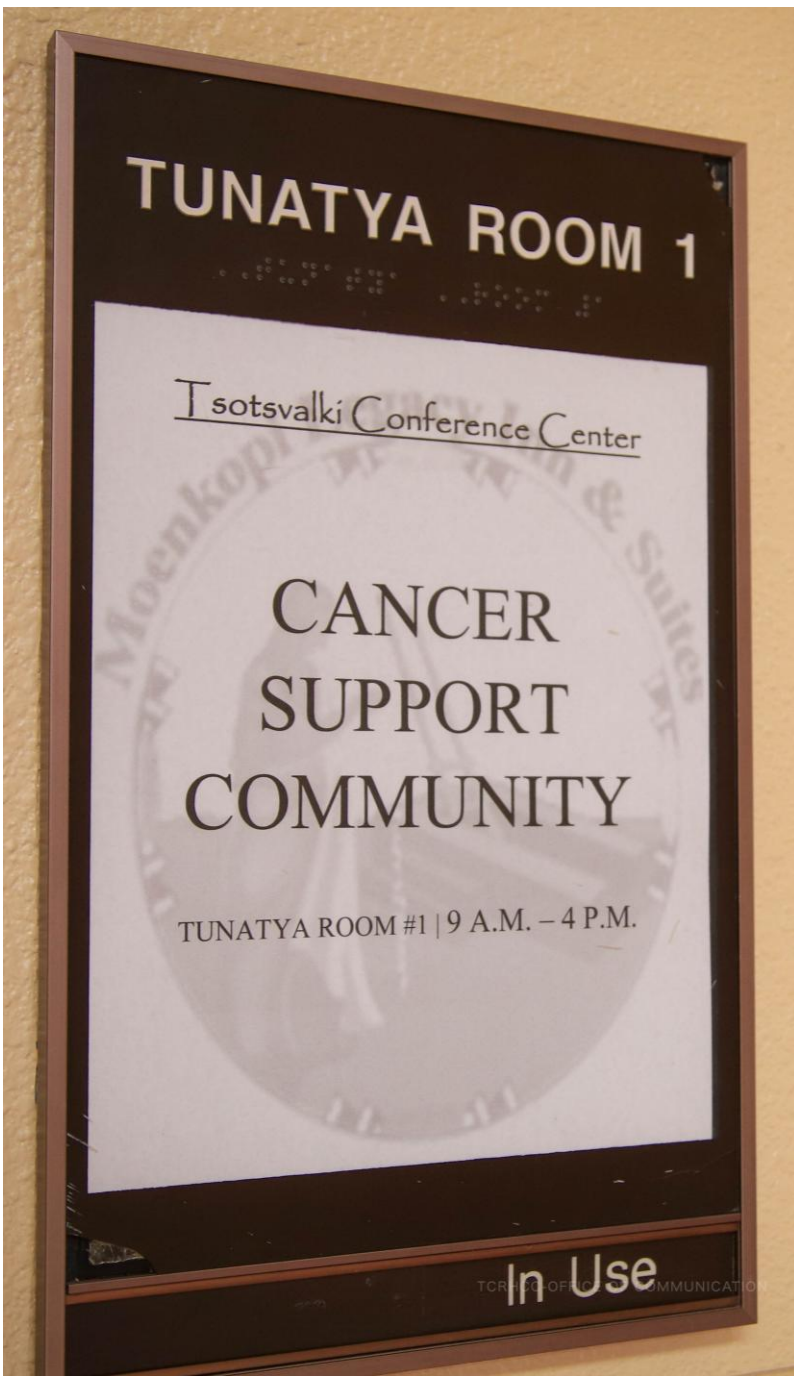
Our CEO [Sally Werner](#) and VP, Mission Delivery [Kelly Hendershot](#) visited our partners at Tuba City Regional Health Care (TCHRCC) on the Navajo Nation this week. Located in Tuba City, Arizona on the Navajo Reservation, TCHRCC's service area is 6,000 square miles and covers the western region of the Navajo, Hopi, and San Juan Paiute Reservations. Their Specialty Care Center offers oncology services that save their patients from traveling long distances for cancer care. We are proud to have CSC services on site!



Sally Werner and 26 others

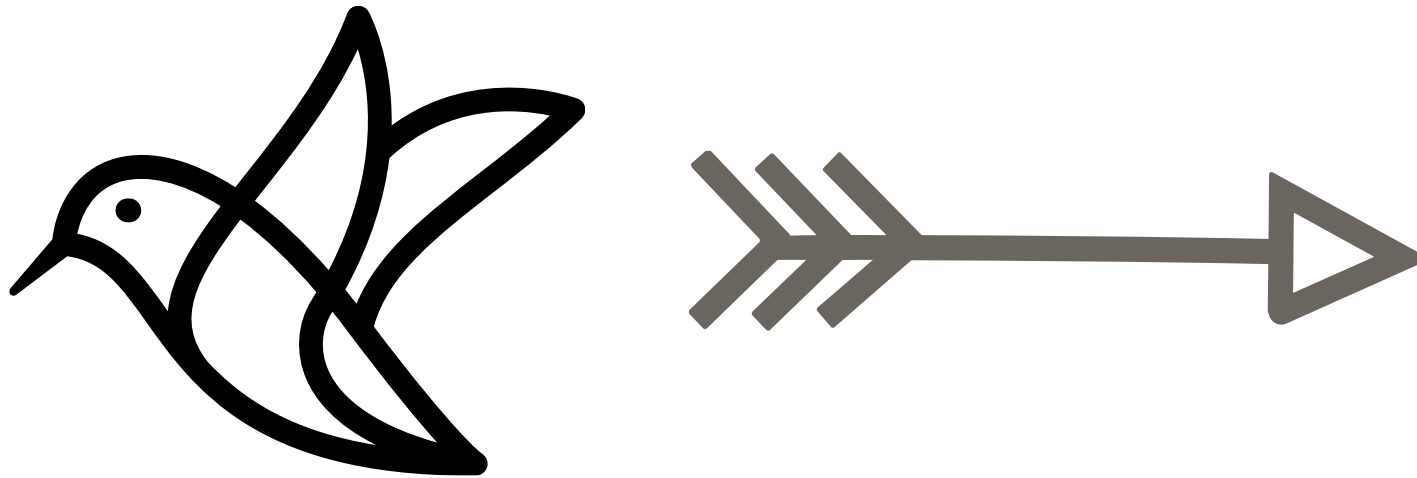
1 comment • 3 reposts





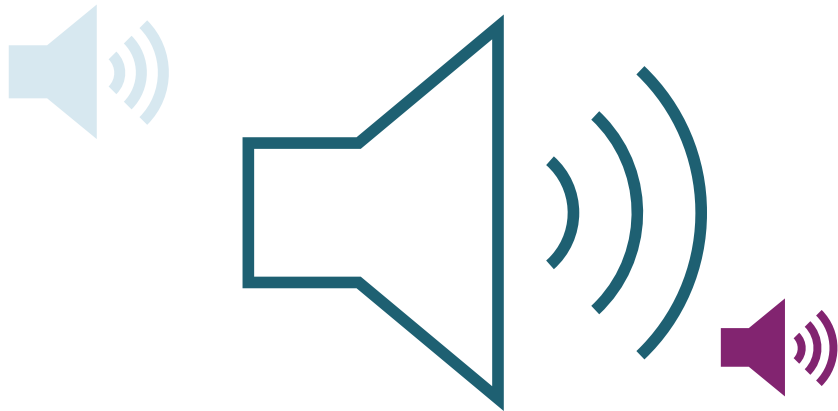
Cultural Adaptations: Visual and Symbolic Design

- Integration of culturally meaningful imagery
- Use of landscapes, jewelry, and symbolic color palettes
- Visual design as a contributor to cultural resonance and healing



Cultural Adaptations: Language and Narrative Structure

- Audio narration in English and Diné
- Accommodation of varied literacy levels
- Use of third-person storytelling to reduce distress
- Alignment with indirect communication norms

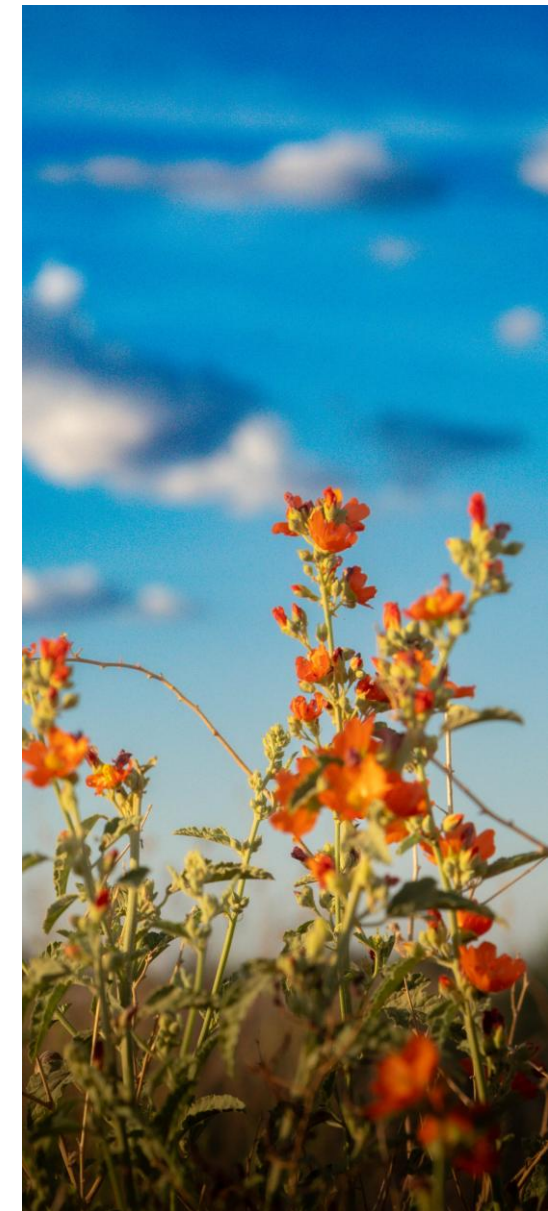


The healthcare team helps
SUPPORT THE PATIENT.



Cultural Adaptation: Transformation NOT Translation

- Cultural adaptation as co-created knowledge production
- Centering humility, reflexivity, and accountability
- Implications for decolonizing psychosocial oncology practice



Cultural Adaptations: Clinical Application

- Interactive use within clinical settings
- Shared patient–provider engagement
- Support for real-time clarification and dialogue
- Strengthening relational trust within care encounters



Adaptation of Distress Screening Tool

Adaptation Focus:

- Cultural reframing of psychosocial distress indicators
- Modification of language and framing
- Trust as enabling honest critique and change

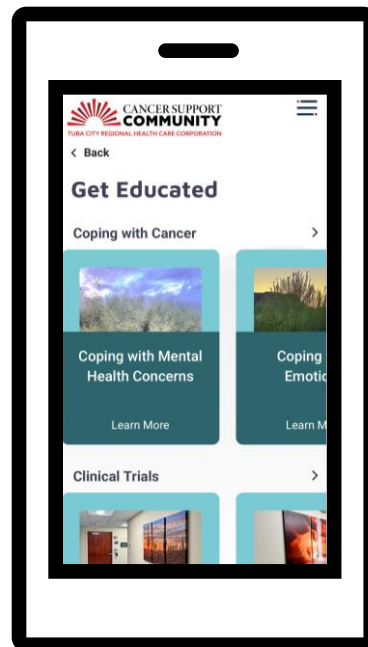
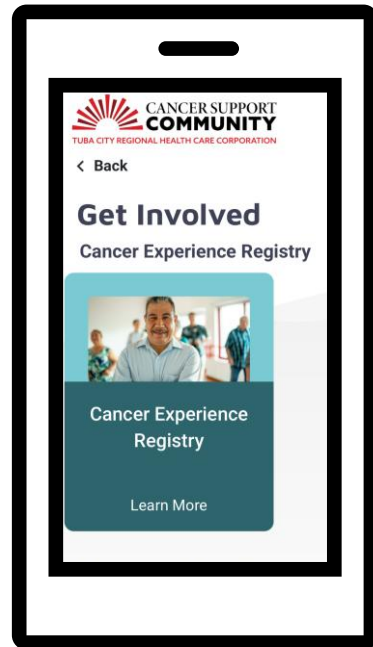
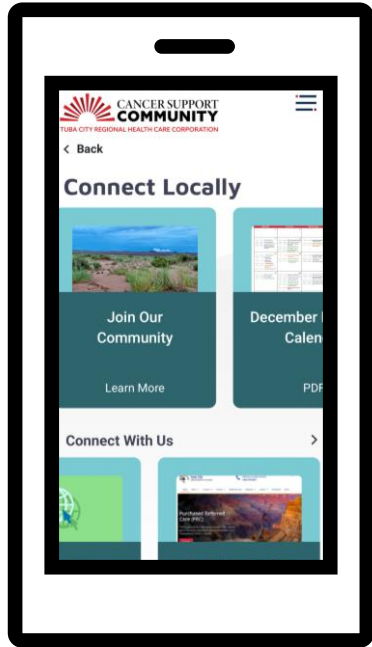


Adjusted: Money worries (originally “Health insurance or money worries”)

New: Having help with chores or taking care of livestock?

Removed: Which of the following categories best describes your total household income, before taxes, from all sources last year?

Addressing Digital Inequity in Psychosocial Interventions



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COMMUNITY**
TUBA CITY
REGIONAL HEALTH CARE CORPORATION

Scan Here



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you need.
All in one place.

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TUBA CITY
Regional Health
Care Corporation



NAVAJO · HOPI
HEALTH FOUNDATION

RUN FOR HOPE

SEPT 20, 2025



Gaps in Psycho-Oncology Research & Practice

- Limited Indigenous-centered psychosocial models
- Insufficient examination of trust as an intervention variable
- Lack of frameworks for culturally grounded adaptation
- Under-addressed structural barriers



Practice Implications for Oncology Social Workers

- Relationship-building as a foundational competency
- Centering community expertise and leadership
- Adjusting timelines and expectations
- Co-creation over dissemination
- Honoring place, culture, and historical context





Summary of Key Practice Takeaways

Key Messages:

Trust is foundational to culturally responsive psychosocial care

Effective adaptation requires relational accountability

Walking together yields sustainable, ethical, and clinically relevant interventions

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Discussion and Q&A



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Communications Department*

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