



NATIONAL AMERICAN INDIAN DISABILITY SYMPOSIUM

*Cultivating Care: The Three Sisters Approach to
Disability in Native Country*

July 16 and July 17, 2026
Agenda and Speaker Bios

This Symposium is Presented by the Planning Committee Members



Day 1: July 16, 2026
8:30-8:45 AM AZ Time

Title: **Welcome & Acknowledgments**
Speaker: Dr. Kimberly Yellow Robe, Symposium Moderator
Organization: Banner Plans & Networks
Email: Kimberly.YellowRobe@bannerhealth.com
Phone: 480-340-7724

Title: **Traditional Blessing**
Speaker: Honorable Mr. Hoskie Benally, Jr.
Organization: Native American Disability Law Center
Email: hbenally@natedisabilitylaw.org
Phone: 505-566-5880



Bio: Mr. Hoskie Benally, Jr. is a Member of the Navajo Nation. Hoskie is legally blind and works as a Community and Government Liaison at the Native American Disability Law Center. He also serves on the National Council on Disability and is the president of the Navajo Nation Advisory Council on Disabilities. Hoskie addresses disability issues on the largest reservation in the United States, advocating for the rights and needs of Native Americans with disabilities. His work includes engaging in disability systems advocacy with the Navajo Nation and other tribes, and he has been instrumental in integrating Navajo culture into mental health treatment programs.

Session 1: 8:45-9:30AM AZ Time

Title: ***Inter-Tribal Disability Advocacy Council Report: Elevating the Invisible Voice of Indigenous Peoples with Disabilities***

Speaker: Kimberly Yellow Robe, PhD, MBA, Senior Manager Tribal Coordination

Organization: Banner Plans and Networks

Email: Kimberly.YellowRobe@bannerhealth.com

Phone: 480-340-7724

Bio: Kimberly Yellow Robe, DHA, MBA, is an enrolled member of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate (Burnt Thigh People) Rosebud, South Dakota. Mrs. Yellow Robe is the Associate Director, of Tribal Coordination Associate Director of Tribal Coordination at Banner Health, where she works to bridge healthcare systems with Indigenous communities across the region.



Learning Objectives:

- Elevating the invisible Voice of Indigenous Peoples with Disabilities.
- Recognizing how Indigenous Determinants of Health impacts healthcare, education, and welfare.

Description: Speaker will present the Inter-Tribal Disability Advocacy Report and the Talking Circles held elevating the voice for American Indians with Disabilities living in urban/rural/reservation communities challenges, barriers, and cultural concerns.

Session 2: 9:30-10:20 AM AZ Time

Title: ***My Health My Choice: Improving breast and cervical cancer screening for Native American Women with intellectual and developmental disabilities***

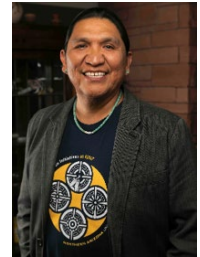
Speaker: Darold H. Joseph, Co-Project Investigator, Associate Professor

Organization: Northern Arizona University

Email: Darold.joseph@nau.edu

Phone: 928-523-7179

Bio: Dr. Darold H. Joseph is a citizen of the Hopi Tribe representing the Paa-Is-wung-wa (Water Coyote Clan) from the Village of Moenkopi on his mother's side and the Nuva-wung-wa (Snow clan) on his father's side from the Village of Shungopavi. He is a son, brother, uncle, husband, father, and grandfather.



Dr. Joseph is an Associate Professor of Special Education and the Director for the Institute for Native-serving Educators at Northern Arizona University. His research focuses on the intersections of health, well-being and education to elevate Indigenous knowledge as a protective factor to foster culturally healthy communities. He is a co-lead investigator for the My Health My Choice American Cancer Society Research Scholar Grant aiming to address cancer health for Native American women with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and he is also a Co-PI on the National Science Foundation funded titled Qöyungnuptu: Smart, Connected, and Culturally-centered System to Support the Well-being of Hopi/Tewa Youth. He is a steadfast advocate for Indigenous students to persist in educational spaces and his extensive background as a leader in education informs his commitment to address the systemic barriers and inequities faced by Indigenous communities to inform and leverage Indigenous nation building.

Speaker: Julie Armin, Co-Project Investigator, Associate Professor

Organization: Department of Family & Community Medicine, College of Medicine – Tucson, The University of Arizona

Email: jarmin@arizona.edu

Phone: 520-626-4166

Bio: Julie Armin PhD is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family & Community Medicine at the University of Arizona, a Member of The University of Arizona Cancer Center, and affiliated faculty with the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities. As a non-Native researcher, she is passionate about partnering with communities and organizations to produce impactful evidence that facilitates improved healthcare, including accessible, inclusive cancer care that builds on the strengths of communities. She brings her training as a humanistic social scientist to inform qualitative, multi-method and community-based research approaches. She is co-leading the My Health My Choice project with Dr. Darold Joseph, which is funded by an American Cancer Society Research



Scholar Grant through the Center for Native American Cancer Health Equity at Northern Arizona University.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the factors that contribute to the limited access to cancer care for Native American women with IDD.
- Understand where MHMC fits into the cancer care continuum.
- Understand the purpose and goals of MHMC program.
- Learn about how you can participate in our research project to assess organizations' readiness for implementation of MHMC for a future project.
- Recognize the public health importance of culturally responsive health programs.

Description:

The My Health My Choice is a community- and university-based cancer research project that aims to improve wellness, cancer knowledge, self-empowerment, and access to breast and cervical screening among Native American Women with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (NAWIDD). This population continues to face significant barriers in preventive care, particularly breast and cervical cancer screening, resulting in delayed diagnosis and poorer health outcomes. Addressing this gap requires collaboration between healthcare organizations serving Native women with IDD, their caregivers and support persons, disability-serving agencies, Native-serving organizations, and members of the public. We welcome all to join us to learn more about the program.

The project is devoted to making cancer screening a form of self-care through a holistic wellness approach in women's health education, empowering NAWIDD to make informed, healthy choices. We will share why this is critical, the outcomes from the pilot study, and how you can partner with us. Please note this is a research project conducted in partnership with Northern Arizona University (NAU), the University of Arizona (UA), and the American Cancer Society (ACS) to help better understand how to care for and support a population that is often overlooked. We welcome all to join us to learn more about the program.

Session 3: 10:30 – 11:20 AM AZ Time
Title: Deaf Education/Self Representation

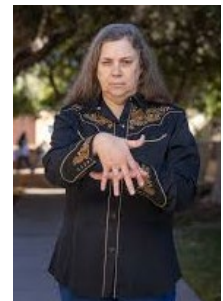
Speaker: Melanie McKay-Cody, PhD, Secretary of TIHT and Assistant Professor

Organization: Turtle Island Hand Talk and Dept of Disability & Psychoeducational Studies,
University of Arizona

Email: drmmcody@gmail.com

Phone: 405-217-3699

Bio: Dr. Melanie McKay-Cody (Cherokee, Shawnee, Powhatan, and Montaukett) earned her doctoral degree in linguistic and socio-cultural anthropology at



the University of Oklahoma. She has studied critically endangered Indigenous Sign Languages in North America since 1994 and helps different tribes preserve their tribal signs. She also specialized in Indigenous Deaf studies and interpreter training incorporating Native culture, North American Indian Sign Language, and ASL. She is also an educator and advocate for Indigenous interpreters and students in educational settings. Besides North American Indian Sign Language research, she taught ASL classes in several universities for over 40 years. She is one of eight founders of Turtle Island Hand Talk, a new group focused on Indigenous Deaf/Hard of Hearing/DeafBlind and Hearing people.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about who we are as Indigenous Deaf people through Indigenous Deaf lenses
- Learn about our struggles in education, invisible problems, communication barriers.-we can work together to combat them.

Description:

The presentation will cover our struggles and barriers in education, services, communication, and many other topics. The Indigenous Deaf people are victims of bad education and have mental challenges with families because they do not use sign languages. Historically, Native Nations do not recognize us for our traditional visual knowledge and our own culture. The presenter will discuss invisible problems in our own Native Nations and beyond. Also explain about newly developed Indigenous Deaf Pedagogy. Our aim is to decolonize and indigenize our education, services, and reclaim our tribal sign languages.

Session 4: 11:30 – 11:50 AM AZ Time

Title: *Tribal Elder Justice Collaborative*

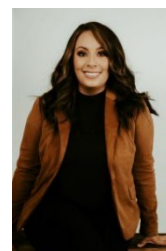
Speaker: Peggy Jo Archer, Director of Elder Justice Projects

Organization: International Association for Indigenous Aging

Email: peggyjo@iasquared.org

Phone: 301-861-0632

Bio: Peggy Jo is the Director of the Elder Justice Project at the International Association for Indigenous Aging IA2. She has dedicated her career to violence prevention, beginning in 2007 with a focus on power-based violence. She has extensive experience supporting both tribal and non-tribal Adult Protective Services (APS) professionals and programs. Currently, she leads the first tribal APS working group, bringing together over 150 APS professionals from tribal nations and state agencies to enhance collaboration and improve services.



Learning Objectives: N/A

Description: N/A

Session 5: 12 – 12:50 AZ Time**Title:** *Meeting Access Needs: All We Need is a Path***Speaker:** Frances Spiegel, Attorney Advisor**Organization:** U.S. Access Board**Email:** spiegel@access-board.gov**Phone:** 202-272-0041**Bio:** Frances Spiegel serves as Attorney Advisor in the Office of General Counsel at the Access Board.**Speaker:** Debra Martins, Training Coordinator**Organization:** U.S. Access Board**Email:** martins@access-board.gov**Phone:** 202-272-0020

Bio: Debra Martins is the Training Coordinator and an Accessibility Specialist at the Access Board. Martins began her role as an Accessibility Specialist, providing technical assistance and training on design standards for accessible buildings, facilities, and public right-of-way. In 2024, Martins took on the additional role and responsibilities of Training Coordinator to oversee the agency's training program where she fields training requests, coordinates educational sessions and webinars, and assigns Board staff for those presentations. Martins brings occupational therapy experience as a clinician, educator, and business owner. She brings a robust skill set consulting on projects within healthcare, public health, education, employment, housing, and mobility/transportation industries with a focus on accessibility. She earned a master's in education from Bowling Green State University, a graduate certificate in assistive technology from Johns Hopkins University, and a Bachelor of Science degree in occupational therapy from Elizabethtown College.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Participants will have an opportunity to learn about the U.S. Access Board, the only federal agency dedicated to accessible design.
- Participants will learn more about the Architectural Barriers Act and how to file complaints.
- Participants will gain an understanding of the Access Board's role in supporting accessible ceremonial and community spaces for tribal members with disabilities

Description:

This session explores practical strategies for improving accessibility for ceremonial spaces, community access, and civic engagement. Led by the U.S. Access Board, presenters will highlight key accessibility principles under the Architectural Barriers Act, share real-world examples of adaptable solutions for outdoor and rural settings, and discuss how thoughtful

design (such as accessible routes, facilities, and equipment) can enhance participation for elders and people with disabilities. Attendees will also learn about available technical assistance, training resources, and tools to support accessibility efforts available from the U.S. Access Board.

Session 6: 1:00 – 1:55 AZ Time

Title: *Speaking the Patient's Language: A Program Development Approach to Expanding Navajo Medical Interpreter Access in Urban Areas*

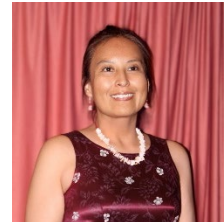
Speaker: Francine McLendon, FNP-BC, MSN, BSN, RN

Organization: University of New Mexico

Email: fran.dee99@gmail.com

Phone: (505) 860-9356

Bio: Francine is a Family Nurse Practitioner with Four Corners Nephrology Associates experienced in providing comprehensive healthcare, developing evidence-based treatment plans, and educating patients on self-management of illnesses.



Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the systemic intersection between historical trauma (e.g., forced relocation, boarding schools) and modern healthcare mistrust among Navajo patients to inform culturally humble clinical workflows.
- Evaluate the operational gaps between federal healthcare mandates (e.g., CLAS standards, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act) and the reality of Navajo medical language interpreter availability in urban, high-acuity medical centers.
- Quantify the clinical safety risks, financial burdens, and mortality impacts associated with language barriers and missing interpretive services for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Indigenous patients.
- Formulate a scalable program development framework to recruit, train, and integrate Navajo medical interpreters within metropolitan hospital systems.
- Synthesize strategies that combine Western medical protocols with traditional Navajo health preferences (noting that 64.2% prefer native healer medicine) to deliver holistic, safe, and equitable cardiovascular and critical care.

Description:

Background & Problem Statement:

American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) communities, specifically the Navajo Nation, endure severe health disparities and a profound mistrust of the healthcare system rooted in centuries of historical trauma, forced assimilation, and systemic marginalization. While

approximately half of the 425,000 tribal members reside on reservation land, local Indian Health Service (IHS) facilities are frequently understaffed and unequipped to provide specialized, invasive, or critical care. Consequently, high-acuity Navajo patients must be medically evacuated to urban metropolitan hospitals across New Mexico.

The Clinical Gap:

Despite the National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Executive Order 13166, a critical gap exists: urban hospitals lack Navajo-language medical interpreters. Given that 50.9% of the Navajo population speaks Navajo as their primary language, this systemic deficiency results in severe medical compromises, including diagnostic errors, medication mismanagement, delayed care, invalid informed consent, and preventable mortality.

Proposed Intervention:

To move reality closer to policy, this paper proposes a structured program development approach to expand and ensure access to Navajo medical language interpreters within urban New Mexico healthcare systems. By integrating cultural humility with robust institutional infrastructure, this program aims to eliminate language barriers, safeguard patient safety, improve clinical outcomes, and rebuild clinical trust with the Navajo patient population.

Session 7: 2 – 2:55 PM AZ Time

Title: *Abuse & Neglect: Protection & Advocacy*

Speaker: Benita McKerry, Advocate and Outreach Team Leader

Organization: Native American Disability Law Center

Email: bmckerry@natedisabilitylaw.org

Phone: 505-566-5880

Bio: Benita McKerry is an Advocate and Outreach Team Leader with the Native American Disability Law Center, bringing over 11 years of service to the organization. She is dedicated to advocating for individuals with disabilities and ensuring access to appropriate support and services. In her role, she conducts outreach and intake activities, while also monitoring group homes and correctional facilities to promote accountability and quality of care. Through her work, Benita plays a key role in strengthening community connections and supporting vulnerable populations across the region.



Speaker: Austin Moore, Staff Attorney
Organization: Native American Disability Law Center

Email: amoore@natedisabilitylaw.org

Phone: 928-433-0963

Bio: Austin Moore is a Staff Attorney at the Native American Disability Law Center in Flagstaff, Arizona. He is a member of the Samish Indian Nation. Since joining the Law Center, Austin has represented clients with disabilities to ensure that they have access to appropriate, inclusive, community-based services. He holds a J.D. with a Certificate in Indigenous Law from the Michigan State University College of Law and a B.A. in History and Philosophy from Carroll College.



Learning Objectives:

- Understand abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- Learn the role of Protection & Advocacy organizations
- Recognize rights of individuals with disabilities
- Identify reporting and prevention strategies

Description:

This session will cover the role of the Native American Disability Law Center in protecting the legal rights of Native Americans with disabilities who live in the four corners area of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

Session 8: 3: 00 – 3:55 PM AZ Time

Title: *National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) Advocacy for Disability Inclusion: Empowering Native Elders & Communities*

Speaker: Scott Willie, TARC Project Coordinator

Organization: National Indian Council on Aging

Email: swillie@nicoa.org

Phone: 505-292-2001

Bio: Scott Willie is a dedicated Project Coordinator at the National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA), where he leverages over a decade of experience in program management, grant administration, and community advocacy to advance the organization's mission of supporting American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian elders. With a background deeply rooted in serving Indigenous communities, Scott brings proven expertise in managing complex, multi-stakeholder grant lifecycles, from ensuring rigorous regulatory compliance to implementing strategic outreach and evaluation initiatives. His career is defined by his ability to build collaborative relationships across tribal, state, and federal agencies, alongside a



commitment to fostering high-performing teams and driving organizational excellence through culturally informed leadership. A graduate of the University of New Mexico with a Public Health Certificate from the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health, Scott is an award-winning professional recognized for his sustained dedication to inclusive excellence and the promotion of equitable health and educational resources.

Speaker: Bernina Gray, NICOA TARC Technical Communications Analyst

Organization: National Indian Council on Aging

Email: bgray@nicoa.org

Phone: 505-292-2001

Bio: Bernina Gray is the Technical Communications Analyst at the National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA), where she supports the Technical Assistance & Resource Center (TARC) through strategic communications, digital resource development, and outreach initiatives. Her work focuses on increasing awareness of aging and disability in Native communities by developing accessible educational materials, supporting digital storytelling projects, and strengthening engagement with Tribal partners and stakeholders.



Learning Objectives:

- Understand NICOA's role, historical and current, in advocacy for native elders with disabilities.
- Gain the skills to identify, affirm, and effectively serve Native Elders with a focus on building long-term relations.
- Apply learning through discussion, review of successful community models, and role-play.

Description:

The National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.'s (NICOA) Technical Assistance & Resource Center (TARC) provides an update on "Understanding Disabilities in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities Toolkit Guide" with the latest projects.

End of Day 1

Day 2: July 17, 2026

8:30 AM AZ Time

Title: Traditional Blessing

Speaker: Dwight Francisco, Native American Cultural Consultant

Email: dwight.a.francisco@gmail.com

Session 9: 8:45-9:20 AM AZ Time

Title: *Disabilities and Indigenous Peoples: Listening, Engaging and Collaborating*

Speaker: Agnes Attakai, Program Manager

Organization: The Circle of Indigenous Empowerment, Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities, University of Arizona College of Medicine

Email: agnesa@arizona.edu

Phone: 520-850-4195



Bio: Agnes Attakai, MPA, Diné (Navajo) Nation has a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Arizona and a Public Health Training Certificate for American Indian Health Professionals from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She is currently a 2nd year PhD student in Teaching, Learning and Sociocultural Studies, University of Arizona College of Education. Agnes engages and collaborates with Tribal Nations in Arizona on training and services in response to the identified needs of Tribal members with disabilities across the state. Agnes is on the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition board and appointed to the AZ Statewide Independent Living Council (AZSILC).

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the root causes of higher rates of disabilities among Indigenous peoples
 - Recognize the impact of historical and social determinates on accessible health care and disability services.
 - Examine how sovereignty and self-determination impact disability programs on Tribal Lands
-

Session 10: 9:30 -10:45 AM AZ time

Title: *IDEA*

Speaker: Therese Yanan, Executive Director

Organization: Native American Disability Law Center

Email:

Phone:
Bio:
Learning Objectives
Description:

Session 11: 10:30-11:55 AM AZ Time

Title: Indigenous Empowerment and Adaptive Sports and Recreation

Speaker: Jim Warne, Affiliate

Organization: Circle of Indigenous Empowerment, Sonoran
Center for Excellence in
Disabilities, University of Arizona, College of Medicine
Email: warriorfoundation@gmail.com



Phone: 619-379-6163

Bio: Educator-Advocate-Filmmaker Jim Warne, Oglala Lakota. Jim earned a BS from Arizona State University and a MS from San Diego State University (SDSU). He created Indigenous Continuing Education programs at SDSU Interwork Institute (1993-2015). He has written over 50 million in grants and contracts. Currently, Jim is Community Engagement Director at University of South Dakota Center for Disabilities, Oyáte Circle Sanford School of Medicine. Jim is President of Warrior Society Development, LLC. He consults for various government agencies and Tribal Nations, including as Affiliate with Arizona College of Medicine. Jim helped create the USD Oyáte Circle, the Arizona Circle of Indigenous Empowerment. Jim's work is focused on disability and indigenous health. Awards include National Council on Independent Living President's Award and the Susan M. Daniels Disability Mentor Hall of Fame. Jim is a Motivational Speaker, experience includes Congressional Testimonies, Workforce Access, Film Production, Actor/Stuntman, Professional Football, Youth Camps, Organizational Development and Higher Education Administration. Jim's Gen7 Film Productions produced "7th Generation" an Award-Winning Documentary (Amazon Prime). His Emmy nominated film, "Oyáte un Itówapi - Pictures of my People" was featured on Fox NFL Pregame Show, and FOX "Voices". "Remember the Children" and "My Native America" are also award-winning films. Website: www.gen7films.com.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn the importance of participation in sports, athletics and recreation.
- Understand how participation in sports, athletics and recreation impacts life
- Discuss the availability of options and opportunities to compete in physical activity.

Description: This presentation will address the importance of sports and recreation for the human experience for those with disabilities. Sports allow for healthy competition,

teamwork and access to various recreation opportunities are essential for health and wellness. The positive experience and outcomes include meeting new people, feeling part of a team, relating to others with similar interests, competitive spirit through sports and recreation activities. These experiences create positive experiential activity for people that share these goals and experiences and inclusion is essential.

People with disabilities also have these goals and interest with sports and recreation activities. The CIE is aware of the need for access to adaptive sports, athletics and recreation which include mountain biking, snow skiing, water skiing, hunting and fishing and many other activities that have various levels of inclusion and availability for people with disabilities. Generally, such access is even less available for rural Tribal communities.

The CIE developed a partnership with Tribal Adaptive to expand adaptive sports, athletics and recreation for Indian Country. Tribal Adaptive created a successful program and this partnership with CIE will enhance programs and opportunities for Tribal members with disabilities that want to participate in sports, athletics and recreation. We are conducting our first camp for Tribal Adaptive on September 12, 2026, in the four corners area. Look for announcements and available sponsorships and scholarships for youth campers.

Session 12: 12:00 – 12:50 AZ Time

Title: ***White House National Council on Disabilities (NCD) Reports on the Incidence of Disability on Tribal Lands***

Speaker: Amy Nicholas, Senior Attorney Advisor

Organization: National Council on Disability

Email: Anicholas@ncd.gov

Phone: 202-731-2313

Bio: Amy Nicholas is a Senior Attorney Advisor at the National Council on Disability (NCD) on NCD's Policy Team and has been with NCD for over 11 years. The National Council on Disability is an independent federal agency tasked with advising the Administration, Congress and federal agencies on disability policy. Amy has managed multiple NCD reports including subjects such as: subminimum wage/AbilityOne, FEMA/emergency management, transportation and employment. Amy served as NCD designee on FEMA's National Advisory Council (NAC) IPAWS Subcommittee and has represented NCD on multiple committees during her tenure at NCD. Prior to joining NCD, Amy was employed at the Department of Transportation as an Equal Opportunity Specialist in its Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights. Amy graduated from the Robert H. McKinney Indiana University School of Law with a Doctor of Jurisprudence (JD). Amy is a member of the Maryland Bar and graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a Bachelor of Arts in Electronic Media.



Learning Objectives:

1. The role of the National Council on Disability

2. The cause and effect of disability on tribal lands

Description:

The National Council on Disability (NCD) is an independent federal agency tasked to advise the Administration, Congress and federal agencies on disability policy. I will provide background on prior and current NCD's reports and activities that highlight the incidence of disability on tribal lands.

Session 13: 1:00 – 1:55 PM AZ Time

Title: *Home- and Community-Based Services for American Indians and Alaskan Natives: Recommendations for Increasing Access and Recognizing Resiliency*

Presenter: Sahar Takshi, Senior Attorney

Organization: Justice in Aging

Email: stakshi@justiceinaging.org

Phone: 813-408-3652

Bio: Sahar Takshi, Senior Attorney for Equity Advocacy, Justice in Aging. Sahar joined Justice in Aging in 2021 and works to advance equity for low-income older adults who are marginalized due to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, disability, immigration status, English language proficiency, or other systemic oppression. She is passionate about improving federal policies and programs that allow older adults to age with dignity, as well as educating legal and aging services providers and policymakers on developing equitable partnerships, outreach, and other programming. Sahar graduated from the University of South Florida with a BA in Psychology and from the American University Washington College of Law with a JD. Prior to joining Justice in Aging, Sahar was a Gallogly Fellow at Legal Counsel for the Elderly where she represented older adult clients seeking to access home- and community-based services.



Presenter: Natalie Kean, Managing Director, Health Advocacy

Organization: Justice in Aging

Email: nkean@justiceinaging.org

Phone: 202-621-1038

Bio: Natalie Kean leads Justice in Aging's health team of attorneys and policy advocates to develop and implement initiatives across the country to improve equitable access to health and long-term care for low-income and marginalized older adults. Natalie has expertise in Medicaid, Medicare, and the Affordable Care Act. Since joining Justice in Aging in 2017, she has been advocating to strengthen health care programs that help older adults live at home and connected to their communities. Natalie holds a JD with a Certificate in Health Law from Saint Louis University and a BS in Economics from the University of Wyoming.



Learning Objectives:

- Understand the basics about Medicaid funded home- and community-based services and their role in American Indian and Alaska Native communities;
- Reflect on recommendations from the policy paper, Home- and Community-Based Services for American Indians and Alaskan Natives: Recommendations for Increasing Access and Recognizing Resiliency; and
- Access other resources regarding home- and community- based services.

Description: Justice in Aging and the Autistic Self Advocacy Network will present their research through the Community Living Equity Center to increase knowledge about home- and community-based services (HCBS) in Indian Country. The research identified policy recommendations to improve access to HCBS with the goals of supporting better health and independence for AI/AN elders and relatives with disabilities and reducing the need for more costly care. Recommendations include increasing federal funding for HCBS and other programs, strengthening partnerships between states and Tribal Nations, and supporting culturally grounded care delivery. These recommendations are centered on recognizing Tribal Nations' capacity to develop and implement solutions that best meet the needs of their own AI/AN elders and relatives with disabilities.

Session 14: 2:00 – 2:55 PM AZ Time

Title: *Disability and Aging - The Importance of Planning Throughout the Lifespan*

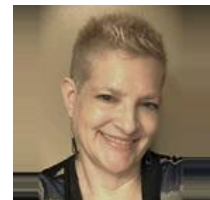
Presenter: Mellie Adu, Chief Executive of Strategy and Innovation

Organization: Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council

Email: mellie@azsilc.org

Phone: 602-262-2900

Bio: Mellie Adu serves as Chief Executive of Strategy and Innovation for Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council (AZSILC), where she leads strategic planning, systems innovation, and statewide initiatives advancing independent living. Her work focuses on strengthening cross-system coordination among disability, aging, housing, transportation, and health partners, while centering consumer direction and community-based solutions. Mellie supports data-informed planning, stakeholder engagement, and policy alignment to expand access, choice, and long-term independence for people with disabilities across Arizona.



Presenter: Melanie Mills, Executive Director

Organization: The Arc of Arizona

Email: melanie@arcarizona.org

Phone: 6022901632

Bio: Melanie Mills is the State Director of The Arc of Arizona, where she leads statewide efforts advancing self-determination, systems coordination, and inclusive planning across the lifespan for people with



intellectual and developmental disabilities. With more than two decades of experience in disability advocacy, policy, and family education, she works closely with aging, health, and community partners to bridge gaps between systems. Her work emphasizes Supported Decision-Making, future-focused planning, and elevating disability-led voices and leadership development.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how aging and disability systems intersect and affect individuals, families, and caregivers across diverse communities, including the American Indian disability community.
- Recognize culturally responsive and person-centered strategies that support proactive planning, autonomy, and aging with dignity for individuals with disabilities.
- Explore practical tools, collaborative partnerships, and community-based resources that strengthen long-term planning and support across tribal, rural, and underserved communities.

Description: As individuals with disabilities live longer lives, the intersection of aging and disability presents complex planning challenges for individuals, families, and service systems. These challenges are often intensified in tribal and rural communities due to geographic barriers, limited-service availability, and the critical role of family and community in caregiving. This presentation, *Disability and Aging: The Importance of Planning Throughout the Lifespan*, explores why early, ongoing, and person-centered planning is essential to supporting autonomy, stability, and quality of life as individuals with disabilities age. Developed as part of the Bridging the Gap on Aging and Disability initiative, this session examines the disconnect between aging and disability systems and the impact of delayed or crisis-driven planning. Participants will explore key transition points across the lifespan—including education, employment, health care, housing, and caregiving—with attention to how systems can better align to support individuals and families in diverse cultural and community contexts. The presentation highlights practical strategies such as Supported Decision-Making, future-focused planning, and cross-system collaboration. Emphasis is placed on respecting community values, strengthening coordination across systems, and supporting families without imposing one-size-fits-all approaches. Attendees will gain actionable insights into how inclusive, culturally responsive planning can reduce system strain and expand meaningful opportunities for individuals with disabilities across all stages of life.

Session 15: 3:00- 3:55 PM AZ Time

Title: *Listening Session: Introducing the Disability Justice Initiative*

Presenter: Kim Mettler, Next Generations Director

Organization: Association on American Indian Affairs

Email: Kim@Indian-Affairs.org

Phone: 204-314-7155

Bio: Kim Mettler is a citizen of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation and serves the Association on American Indian Affairs as its Next Generations Director. Beginning her diverse service in Native Country with the Indigenous Women's Network, Kim has served as legal counsel for Native Nations; provided training and co-advocacy with court appointed special advocates; and directed Tribal STAR, an ICWA training and technical assistance program, and the development of California's Common Core ICWA curriculum for social workers. She currently serves as a member of the Native American Community Board, providing advocacy on the regional, national and international levels on Native women's health, domestic violence, sexual assault, reproductive and environmental justice. Kim is a skilled coach, facilitator and mediator and brings more than 25 years of advocacy and bridge building with and on behalf of Native women, youth and Native Nations.

Learning Objectives: none provided

Description: The Association on American Indian Affairs is the oldest national Native serving nonprofit dedicated to protecting and uplifting Native Nations and their citizens. Our work is designed to empower Native peoples by reclaiming and preserving what defines us, while fostering healing, understanding and allyship. Native Peoples have the highest rate of disability and chronic illness, and face disproportionate barriers to independent living, healthcare, employment, education and community engagement. Despite these realities, Native disability justice issues remain significantly underrepresented in public discourse, advocacy spaces, and online resource networks. The purpose of this listening session is to introduce the Association's new Disability Justice Initiative and provide an opportunity for participants to help shape the initiative by sharing lived experiences, identifying priorities and gaps, and offering guidance on how the Association can most meaningfully support Natives with disabilities. Through this conversation, the Initiative will better reflect the voices, expertise and needs of the people it seeks to serve while building a stronger foundation for advocacy, education and connection in Native country.

Session 16: 4:00 – 4:30 PM AZ Time

Title: *American Cancer Society: I Love You Get Screened*

Presenter: Lindsey Shirley, Director Regional Integrated Marketing Communications

Organization: American Cancer Society

Email: lindsey.shirley@cancer.org

Phone: 505-920-0648

Bio: Lindsey Shirley serves as the Marketing Communications Director for the American Cancer Society in Arizona, where she is dedicated to amplifying the organization's mission through intentional storytelling and strategic marketing campaigns. Deeply passionate about



engaging with diverse populations, Lindsey focuses on raising critical awareness about the vital importance of early detection and cancer prevention. Ultimately, her work is driven by a commitment to help end cancer as we know it, for everyone.

Learning Objectives:

- How ACS is showing up in Indigenous communities in Arizona
- How to access CanceRisk360 to reduce cancer risks

Description: Sharing details on the American Cancer Society's work in Indigenous communities is essential to ending cancer as we know it, for everyone. Highlighting various aspects of community outreach will show how raising awareness about early detection and prevention directly helps increase life-saving screening rates.

End of Day2

- All sessions will be recorded individually and a link will be emailed to participants.
- Thank you to our Symposium Committee Planning members.
- A report from the Symposium will be developed and sent to participants.

To request additional information, please contact:

Kimberly Yellow Robe, Symposium Chair
kimberly.yellowrobe@bannerhealth.com

Agnes Attakai, Symposium Liaison from the Sonoran Center
agnes@arizona.edu