

Collective Efforts in Advancing Indigenous Nursing through Partnership

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This report speaks to collaboration that is advancing the growth of Oklahoma Native American nurses. At the heart of our efforts is the Indigenous value of “Making Relatives” — a commitment to relationships that foster belonging and shared purpose.

Our partnership between the Oklahoma Indigenous Nurses Association (OINA) and the Northeastern Oklahoma Recruitment and Advancement of American Indians into Nursing (NEORAAIN) reflects this principle. Together, we’re building supportive networks that recognize and uplift Native nursing students, honoring both their challenges and their strengths.



American Indian communities face disproportionate health disparities, higher mortality rates from heart disease, diabetes, and unintentional injuries, and a life expectancy 5.5 years shorter than other U.S. populations (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021). These outcomes are tied to historic trauma and limited access to culturally responsive care. Increasing Native nurse representation is a critical step toward health equity for Oklahoma communities.

Students carry heavy burdens. Many are caregivers, parents, and full-time workers. Despite these barriers, our stu-

dents persist with resilience. Through NEORAAIN, students receive academic and financial support, and through OINA, they are connected to professional development and mentorship. These aren’t just services, they are relationships that create space for Native students to be seen, supported, and celebrated.

A powerful example of this took place on May 8, 2025, during the Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College (NEO) Nursing Pinning Ceremony, where NEORAAIN scholars were honored in a culturally grounded ceremony. This historic moment marked the first time in Oklahoma that Indigenous nursing students were recognized within a formal pinning event in this way.

Honoring ceremonies foster connection, recognizing the vital role each individual plays in the community. By celebrating one another spiritually, we affirm that everyone is significant. The graduating nursing students received meaningful gifts: a blanket, an abalone shell with sage, cedar, and sweetgrass, plus a beaded stethoscope, all blessed in a sweat lodge ceremony. These items symbolize the importance of connecting with patients and nourishing their spirits. As nurses, it’s essential to care for our own spirits too, ensuring we provide compassionate care while honoring the sacred bond with those we serve.

Mentorship is also central to our shared vision. Inspired by successful models like the Caring for Our Own Program at Montana State University, we’re working to expand Native-to-Native nurse mentorship in Oklahoma, offering students guidance grounded in shared cultural understanding (Larsson & Johnson, 2022).



In addition, OINA and NEORAAIN had the opportunity to co-present a screening of “Everybody’s Work” at the Oklahoma Nurses Association (ONA) Region 2 Spring Luncheon, hosted at Tulsa Community College South Campus. Special thanks to Angela Archer, MSN, RN, for coordinating this meaningful event and helping foster community connections.

Lastly, we were so honored to welcome Dr. Margaret Moss to our June 4th OINA monthly meeting, where she shared powerful insights on Indigenous health equity and nursing leadership. Her words inspired dialogue, reflection, and renewed commitment among students and nurses across Oklahoma. ■

References

- Larsson, L., & Johnson, C. M. (2022). The Caring for Our Own Program: A model for American Indian and Alaska Native nursing students to practice, manage, and lead in Indian Country. *Nurse Educator*, 47(5), 272–277. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NNE.0000000000001183>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2021). *The future of nursing 2020–2030: Charting a path to achieve health equity* (J. L. Flaubert, S. Le Menestrel, D. R. Williams, & M. K. Wakefield, Eds.). National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25982>