



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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Chickasaw Nation Mental Wellness Champion

A Mental Wellness Champion is anyone who actively supports and promotes mental health. Anyone can be a mental wellness champion, not just mental health professionals. Champions embody the Chickasaw Nation's mission, core values and cultural heritage while advocating for mental wellness and overall well-being. They work to reduce stigma, promote understanding and encourage access to mental health services.

A common misconception is that a mental wellness champion must be a licensed mental health professional. Champions simply need to care about others. Champions play a vital role by offering support, recognizing when someone may need help and facilitating access to appropriate resources.

Mental wellness champions are dedicated to continuous learning. They attend trainings, acquire tools and resources and commit to healthy living. They recognize mental health as a key component of overall health and are willing to talk about its importance. Champions help normalize mental health conversations and serve as bridges, linking others to the Chickasaw Nation Department of Family Services when additional support is needed. To become a mental wellness champion, individuals should learn about health and the role mental wellness plays in it, attend mental wellness trainings, share knowledge with others, speak openly about mental health within families, workplaces and communities, understand available services and perform warm handoffs to ensure proper care connections.

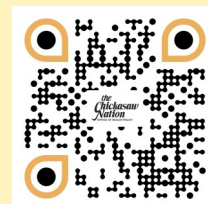
The Chickasaw Nation prioritizes creating a supportive environment where mental health is openly discussed, supported and accessible. By encouraging everyone to act as a mental wellness champion, the nation fosters a culture of safety and belonging, ensuring individuals and families feel empowered to seek help when needed.

For more information, please contact the Chickasaw Nation Department of Family Services who can offer guidance, mental health services and coordination of care. Their phone number is (580) 272-9630. Together, through shared commitment, the Chickasaw Nation moves toward a stronger, healthier and more connected future.

What are 1115 Demonstrations?

With the new 1115 demonstrations for traditional health care practices being approved, the question may be posed, "what is an 1115 demonstration?" Section 1115 of the Social Security Act gives the Secretary of Health and Human Services the authority to waive compliance with certain Medicaid requirements. In addition, the secretary may permit states to use federal Medicaid funds in ways not otherwise allowed. Demonstrations give states flexibility to test new ideas for dealing with problems experienced by Medicaid patients.

Demonstration projects are usually approved for a period of up to five years and must be budget neutral, meaning they would have no more impact on the federal budget than the traditional Medicaid program. Demonstrations are important to First Americans and can have a direct impact on tribal health programs. There are also significant public input requirements, which include tribal consultation and publicly available evaluations. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services encourage states to comply with the state and tribal consultation input. [Primer: State Plan Amendments v. Section 1115 Waivers](#)



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Office of Health Policy

Legislative Update

The Office of Health Policy closely monitored the progress and legislative developments throughout the 60th Oklahoma Legislative Session. During this session, our office tracked a 150 bills. Of these, 74 originated in the House of Representatives and 76 were introduced in the Senate. Out of the 150 tracked bills, 23 were either signed into law by Governor Kevin Stitt, filed with the secretary of state without the governor's signature, or enacted after the legislature voted to override the governor's veto.

Bills selected for tracking focused on a variety of public health-related topics, including mental health, health care initiatives, general health policy, nutrition and education. Selection is based on each bill's potential impact on individual well-being and overall public health across the Chickasaw Nation. Additional consideration is given to legislation that may influence tribal sovereignty, access to services and health outcomes in First American communities.



Each bill's progress is tracked daily, with all actions and updates recorded. Documentation is customized to reflect the needs and priorities of other departments within the Chickasaw Nation, allowing for effective cross-departmental communication and planning. Staff remain in close contact with legislative liaisons to ensure timely updates and responses as bills move through the process.

At the conclusion of the legislative session in May, a summary of the final actions taken on the relevant bills is compiled and shared with the corresponding departments. This summary helps inform future planning and policy development efforts across the Chickasaw Nation.

If you are interested in following Oklahoma's Legislature, visit [OKSenate.gov](https://oksenate.gov) and [OKHouse.gov](https://okhouse.gov).

Students Explore Health Policy

Six Chickasaw students recently completed an East Central University course offered through the office of health policy called Chickasaw History: Intersection of Health and Policy. Our students were all East Central University political science majors. This class provides an excellent introduction to health policy and plays a vital role ensuring policies affecting First Americans are accurately understood and interpreted. Students worked to understand health policy concepts. We discussed tribal sovereignty, 1115 demonstration waivers, tribal consultation, history of the First American health care system, presidential executive orders and the impact policy can have on health, including the health ranking of the Chickasaw Nation counties. Each year, we work on a project to improve the health of Chickasaw citizens.

Stephen Hallett, a student of the course this year, said, "I would highly recommend the Chickasaw History: Health and Policy course. The class teaches about our culture, history and how our leaders are improving the health of our people. This course exposes students to careers available in health care policy with our tribe and gives valuable insights even for those who will not work in health care."



Stephen Hallett

Flu/RSV Vaccine

Flu and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) vaccines are essential tools in protecting individual and public health, especially during the fall and winter seasons when respiratory viruses are most active. These vaccines help prevent severe illness, hospitalization and death, particularly among vulnerable populations such as infants, older adults, pregnant individuals and those with weakened immune systems or chronic health conditions. By getting vaccinated, individuals reduce their risk of infection and contribute to community immunity, helping to protect those who cannot be vaccinated due to medical conditions or age. Annual flu vaccines are important because the virus changes frequently and immunity from previous vaccinations or infections may wane over time. Similarly, RSV vaccines offer crucial protection against a virus that can cause serious complications, including pneumonia and bronchiolitis, especially in high-risk groups. Vaccination also helps ease the burden on health care systems, especially during peak respiratory illness seasons when hospital resources are strained. Staying up to date with flu and RSV vaccines is a simple but powerful step in promoting better health and safety for all. Contact your health care provider for more information on immunizations and the best time to receive them based on your individual risk factors.

