

Connecting Nutrition, Recovery, and Food Sovereignty Through Tribal-led Produce Rx



At a Glance

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) developed an innovative Produce Prescription (Produce Rx) pilot program that links nutrition, addiction recovery, and cultural food sovereignty. Participants receive fresh produce grown in the Tribe's Food Sovereignty Program gardens, connecting healthy food access with local food production and traditional food systems.



Key Public Health Challenges

Persistent Poverty

Geographic Isolation

Damaging Historic Policies

Food insecurity disproportionately affects Native American communities in Montana, with Indigenous populations experiencing rates roughly two to four times higher than the national average.¹ This disparity is driven by persistent poverty, geographic isolation, and the lasting effects of historical policies that disrupted traditional Indigenous food systems. On the Flathead Reservation, these historical and economic disruptions have contributed to a heavy reliance on highly processed foods and created significant barriers to accessing fresh fruits and vegetables.

At the same time, Tribal leaders identified an urgent need to address interconnected public health priorities, including food insecurity, substance use recovery, and mental health. **Community assessments conducted during the program's first year found that while residents were motivated to improve their health through better nutrition, they faced significant resource constraints and expressed a strong desire to reconnect with traditional foods and cultural practices.**

Approach

In response to these challenges, CSKT's Food Sovereignty Program collaborated with CSKT Tribal Health Addiction and Mental Health Service's new Intensive Outpatient Treatment Program to provide Produce Rx tailored for individuals in recovery. **Integrating Produce Rx, which includes traditional food teachings and nutrition education, into an intensive outpatient substance use treatment program helps address food insecurity and improve health.**

Key components include:

Tribal Leadership

Program aligns directly with tribal health directives targeting food security, addiction recovery, and mental health



Food Sovereignty and Nutrition Education

Participants engaged in weekly sessions focused on food sovereignty nutrition education



Data-Driven Evaluation

Staff secured Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to utilize anonymous pre- and post-program participant intake forms and surveys to evaluate programmatic impact

[1] Maillacheruvu, S. U. (2022, October 4). The historical determinants of food insecurity in Native communities. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-historical-determinants-of-food-insecurity-in-native-communities>

"The Produce Rx program is a creative and meaningful tool we now have for strengthening the health and resilience of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai community. Access to fresh, local foods directly supports our people's physical and mental wellness, while also reinforcing cultural values around land, food, and collective care. We've seen participants reduce food insecurity, improve chronic health conditions, and reconnect with traditional foodways. This project aligns with several Tribal Council priorities—addressing hunger, supporting mental health, reducing the impacts of addiction, and honoring cultural values. It's more than a nutrition program; it's a pathway toward healing, dignity, and long-term community strength."

Dana Hewankorn, CSKT Food Sovereignty Program Manager

Results

The intensive Produce Rx pilot cohort launched in April 2026, enrolling an initial group of seven participants into a 12-week Intensive Outpatient Program. Over the spring and early summer, the cohort met weekly to participate in Produce Rx activities. Participants will be eligible for food boxes created from the Food Sovereignty gardens during harvest time.

Sustaining Success

Building upon lessons learned from this initial pilot, CSKT is finalizing plans to launch its next cohort in early August 2026. Financially, the team is focused on diversifying and strengthening its funding sources to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program. To support this effort, the team has submitted grant applications to private foundations to secure supplemental funding for the purchase of fresh produce during the months when locally grown food is unavailable.



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For More Information



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**Confederated Salish and Kootenai
Tribe's Food Sovereignty Program**

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