



June 2026

BAKERSFIELD AMERICAN INDIAN HEALTH PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Mental Health Awareness: Healing Through Community and Culture

Mental Health Awareness Month is an important time for Bakersfield American Indian Health Project (BAIHP) to raise awareness about the mental health challenges that affect Native American communities. Through education, outreach, and community events, BAIHP works to reduce stigma, promote healing, and connect individuals and families with support and resources.

This year's May Mental Health event brought together community members, partners, and service providers to celebrate mental health awareness and strengthen connections. Participants shared experiences, engaged in meaningful conversations, and took part in a creative art activity that encouraged self-expression and healing.

The event also highlighted the importance of whole-person wellness, which includes mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Through traditional teachings such as the Bear Dance and the support of BAIHP's care team, the message was clear: healing is possible, support is available, and no one has to face mental health challenges alone.



Top News

BAIHP CEO Angel Galvez recently delivered a keynote speech at the NAMI Multicultural Symposium, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive mental health care and community collaboration.

BAIHP Updates

BAIHP recently hosted its First Annual Donor Gathering, bringing together supporters, partners, and community members for an evening of connection, appreciation, and shared vision.



Bakersfield American
B·A·I·H·P
Indian Health Project

Our Feathers Soaring Higher

www.BakersfieldAIHP.org

Mental Health Awareness: CEO Angel Galvez Interview

Q 1: Why is Mental Health Awareness Month important to BAIHP?

Mental Health Awareness Month is important to BAIHP because it provides an opportunity to raise awareness about the mental health challenges that disproportionately affect Native American communities. Native Americans and Native American veterans experience higher rates of suicide and mental health struggles, making education, support, and open conversations especially critical in our community. Through events and community engagement, BAIHP works to reduce stigma, encourage healing, and create safe spaces where individuals and families can talk openly about mental health and access the support they need.

Q 2: Can you briefly summarize this year's May Mental Health event?

This year's May Mental Health event brought community members, allies, and service providers together in a safe and welcoming space to celebrate mental health awareness, share lived experiences, and strengthen connections. The event highlighted the importance of support and healing through community, including an art activity that



encouraged participants of all ages to express their mental health journey in a creative and meaningful way.

Q 3: Why is mental health an important part of overall wellness?

For many Native American, Alaska Native, and Indigenous communities, wellness is rooted in maintaining balance among spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental health.

A whole-person, trauma-informed approach to care recognizes the connection between these areas and helps individuals strengthen their overall well-being, supporting recovery, resilience, and a healthier daily life.

Q 4: What is the significance of the Bear Dance?

The Bear Dance is a sacred ceremonial tradition that honors balance, healing, and connection to the natural elements of life. Through prayer, dance, and community participation, it represents renewal, spiritual growth, and a fresh beginning for those seeking healing from trauma, addiction, or life's challenges. By bringing people together in a circle of unity and respect, the Bear Dance reinforces the importance of traditional Indigenous ways of healing and wellness.

Q 5: What message do you feel the community took away from this event?

The main message of the event was that mental health struggles are real, and individuals living with severe mental illness often need compassionate, ongoing support to navigate life's challenges. By building trust within our community and offering services through family advocates, social workers, psychologists, physicians, and community health workers, we are committed to meeting people where they are and providing the care they need to heal.

Honoring Our Supporters: BAIHP's First Donor Gathering

On May 22, the Bakersfield American Indian Health Project (BAIHP) hosted its first-ever Donor Gathering to recognize and thank the community members who generously support our mission through financial contributions.

The event was attended by the BAIHP Board of Directors, CEO Angel Galvez, and was hosted by Community Outreach Specialist Lawrence Salcido. Before dinner at Hodel's, Lawrence shared an overview of the challenges facing the American Indian and Alaska Native population in Kern County, highlighting disparities in substance use,



mental health, and domestic violence, while emphasizing the need for continued collaborative efforts to address these ongoing issues.

The presentation was followed by personal stories from BAIHP clients that demonstrated the impact of our programs and services. Gabrielle Hernandez, ShaMekka Ludd, and Evelyn Ballengee each shared their experiences, highlighting youth engagement, housing support, and family advocacy services.

The evening concluded with a look toward the future of BAIHP, including upcoming construction projects and plans for our Behavioral Health Bridge Housing project.

These efforts reflect our continued commitment to expanding services and strengthening support for our local community.

To learn more or to make a donation that helps us continue this important work, please visit us at the link below:

www.bakersfieldaihp.org/community/donate.



Save the Date: Sexuality & Gender Identity Healthcare Symposium



The 3rd Annual Sexuality & Gender Identity Healthcare Symposium will be held on Friday, June 30, 2026, at Bakersfield College, located at 1801 Panorama Drive in Bakersfield. Doors open at 8:30 a.m., and the symposium will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. This transformative event brings together healthcare professionals, community organizations, community members, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to promote health equity and inclusive care throughout Kern County.

Attendees will have the opportunity to learn about gender diversity, address stigma, and explore ways to create more affirming healthcare environments. The symposium aims to strengthen cultural competency among healthcare providers while fostering meaningful dialogue between providers and the communities they serve. Through education, collaboration, and shared experiences, participants will gain valuable tools to support culturally responsive and equitable healthcare practices. BAIHP is proud to support opportunities that advance understanding, respect, and access to quality care for all.

Honoring Two-Spirit & Indigqueer Relatives

Two-Spirit and Indigqueer identities have long existed within many Indigenous cultures and communities across Turtle Island. Traditionally, many Native Nations recognized and honored people who carried both masculine and feminine spirits, often viewing them as important cultural leaders, healers, caregivers, and knowledge keepers.

The term “Two-Spirit” was created in 1990 by Indigenous LGBTQ+ leaders to reflect these cultural identities and experiences, while “Indigqueer” is a modern term that celebrates Indigenous queer identity and resilience. Colonization and boarding school systems disrupted many traditional teachings about gender and sexuality, leading to stigma and discrimination that still impact Indigenous communities today.

Gender-affirming care is an important part of supporting the health, dignity, and well-being of Two-Spirit and Indigqueer people. This care can include respectful healthcare, mental health support, culturally safe spaces, and the use of chosen names and pronouns.

Research shows that affirming environments help reduce depression, anxiety, and suicide risk among LGBTQ+ youth and adults.



NAMI Multicultural Symposium

On June 2, 2026, the Bakersfield American Indian Health Project (BAIHP) attended the 3rd Annual National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Multicultural Symposium. The event brought together individuals and organizations committed to addressing the impact of mental health and mental illness across communities. Hosted by NAMI Board President Sharon Woolfolk, the symposium featured cultural presentations, speeches, and a panel discussion.

BAIHP CEO Angel Galvez served as the keynote speaker, sharing his personal family history, discussing Indigenous struggles to access mental health services, and exploring how historical trauma shapes Indigenous perspectives on mental health.

He further discussed how the loss of traditions, resulting from California's troubled history with Indigenous peoples, often prevented them from participating in the ceremonies that once supported and sustained them.

Later, during the panel, Community Outreach Specialist Lawrence Salcido spoke about common perceptions of mental health among Indigenous peoples and how much of the apprehension stems from a history in which ceremony was illegal until the Indian Religious Freedom Act passed in 1978. Many of today's Elders lived much of their lives without access to ceremony.

The event was powerful, especially hearing fellow panelists share diverse cultural perspectives, including Hispanic, Black, South Asian, Disabled, Elderly, and Death Services viewpoints. Though there are some key differences, it was inspiring to hear the various commonalities between the different panelists. BAIHP was honored to be included and to have the opportunity to share perspectives from our community.

Grilled Salmon & Avocado Salad



Ingredients

1. Frozen salmon filets (4-ounce each, thawed) - **4**
2. Olive oil - **1 tbsp**
3. Grill seasoning (no-salt (Mrs. Dash Steak Grilling Blend)) - **1 tbsp**
4. Romaine lettuce (chopped) - **4 cup**
5. Red onion (thinly sliced) - **1/2 cup**
6. Cucumber(s) (thinly sliced) - **1 cup**
7. Ripe avocado (peeled, seeded and sliced) - **1**
8. Lime juice - **1/4 cup**
9. Olive oil - **1 tbsp**
10. Dijon Mustard - **1 tsp**
11. Stevia - **1 tsp**
12. Salt - **1/4 tsp**
13. Black pepper - **1/4 tsp**

Author: American
Diabetes Association
Prep Time: 15 min.
Cook Time: 1 hr 10 min
Servings: 4

Directions

1. Preheat an indoor or outdoor grill.
2. Pat the thawed salmon filets dry with a paper towel. Brush each side with the olive oil and season with the no-salt grill seasoning.
3. Grill the salmon filets on each side for 4-5 minutes, or until just cooked through. Set aside.
4. Build each salad starting with 1 cup of Romaine lettuce, top with 1/4 of the sliced onion, 1/4 cup of the sliced cucumber, the grilled salmon filet, and 1/4 of the sliced avocado. Repeat for remaining three salads.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together the lime juice, olive oil, Dijon mustard, Stevia, salt, and pepper. Drizzle the dressing over each salad.

Employee Spotlight

This month, we recognize Johnny Delgado, Grant Program/Project Director at BAIHP. He has consistently demonstrated outstanding leadership, professionalism, and integrity, serving as



a trusted ambassador for BAIHP and strengthening partnerships with community stakeholders, grantors, and external partners. Through his collaborative approach and dedication to improvement, he has advanced organizational goals and excellence.



Subscribe to our Newsletter

Donate to BAIHP

Bear Dance & Sweat Lodge Gathering

The Bear Dance and Sweat Lodge gathering brought together community members in a meaningful celebration of culture, healing, and unity. The Bear Dance serves as an important tradition that honors renewal, balance, and connection among families and generations. Through songs, dancing, and shared participation, the event created a space for cultural expression and strengthened community relationships. Elders and cultural leaders played a vital role in guiding the gathering, ensuring that traditions and teachings were respectfully shared with younger generations.

A key focus of the event was the establishment and continuation of the Sweat Lodge, an important spiritual and cultural practice for many Native American communities. The Sweat Lodge provides a place for prayer, reflection, purification, and healing. Participants entered the lodge with respect and intention, recognizing the sacred nature of the ceremony and the importance of maintaining traditional protocols. The gathering emphasized the value of preserving these cultural practices as a source of strength, resilience, and identity within the community.

Smokefree Parks Policy Update



We'd like to share an update and recognize those who presented at the Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Committee meeting. Karina, Yesenia, and Lawrence delivered a compelling presentation on the importance of adopting a Smokefree Parks policy in the city. They discussed gaps in current state law, presented local data showing strong community support, and shared a vision for how the policy could be implemented. Following the presentation, Councilmember Eric Arias expressed agreement that the city should adopt a local policy.

Because there were not enough council members present to establish a quorum, the committee was unable to take formal action. However, members agreed to bring the item back for discussion at the next meeting, along with a memorandum from city staff. Looking ahead, the next step will be to review the proposed ordinance and provide technical assistance as needed. The objective is to ensure the ordinance reflects best practices before it advances to the full City Council for consideration and a vote.

We are incredibly proud of the team's efforts and the Committee also wants to recognize members Berny, Angeles, Maria, and Celina for attending the meeting and helping gather support cards. Thank you all for your dedication, hard work, and commitment to advancing this important initiative.



Happy Birthday to BAIHP Staff for June!

August Accetta, MD (June 12), Alanna Costello, FNP (June 13), Janet Palomares (June 24), Zahid Sheikh, PsyD, MBA (June 6)

501 40th Street, Bakersfield, CA 93301
12308 Mountain Mesa Road, Lake Isabella, CA 93240



@TheBAIHP



@BAIHP



@BakersfieldAmel