

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RURAL, TRIBAL HEALTHCARE BENEFIT FROM PARTNERSHIP

Redlands Community College, Western Oklahoma State College awarded \$2.75 million

Altus, Okla. — Healthcare in rural Oklahoma continues to be impacted by a lack of providers, but a five-year federal grant totaling \$2.75 million awarded to Redlands Community College in El Reno and Western Oklahoma State College in Altus is designed to address the healthcare shortage.

Redlands, designated a Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTI) program, partnered with Western to submit a proposal for the NASNTI Part A Cooperative Arrangement Development Grant. Through targeted outreach and recruitment, success coaching, the development of a cultural competency micro-credential and offering of a Health Careers Edventure program, the two colleges plan to use the funding to increase the number of nursing graduates and expand tribal partnerships in their 10-county service areas.

“Redlands has been a historically strong NASNTI partner, and we’re excited about this opportunity to use this funding to collaborate with Western,” said Redlands President Jack

Bryant. “Our primary service areas encompass many rural communities and tribal areas, so we are anxious to get this initiative implemented so we can begin attacking this healthcare crisis.”

The partnership between Redlands and Western is designed to address the nursing shortage by increasing student capacity in both colleges’ nursing programs as well as address the level of care provided to Native American tribes. Through the NASNTI grant, a director will oversee success coaches and outreach specialists assigned to each campus who will assist with student retention, persistence and completion. They will also focus on recruiting and creating pathways for more students, including those with local tribes and nations, to pursue education and careers in healthcare.

According to The Commonwealth Fund, Oklahoma’s health system is ranked 49th in the nation. Oklahoma also ranks 5th for states with the most rural hospital closures since 2005, and nationally, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center, over 100,000 nurses left positions in hospitals in 2021. Between hospital closures and a shortage of nurses, rural areas and tribes are finding it difficult to meet the needs of its citizens.

“Quality healthcare is pivotal to the sustainability of rural Oklahoma. NASNTI funding will allow us to enhance our efforts already placed on rural nursing and add a new focus on the success of nursing students in tribal areas,” said WOSC President Chad Wiginton. “Partnering with Redlands Community College on this critical initiative will impact 10 rural counties inclusive of nine federally recognized Native American tribes and nations. We are excited about the opportunity and honored to be a part of this timely collaboration.”

In addition to the lack of access to healthcare, there are other barriers for Oklahoma’s Native American tribes and nations, including lack of cultural understanding in healthcare. Developing a better understanding of the cultures in different tribes and nations will enable

healthcare providers to better meet the physical, mental and spiritual needs of Native Americans. To address the need for cultural competency in healthcare, Redlands and Western nursing staff will collaborate with healthcare experts in local area tribes and nations to develop culturally relevant curriculum.

“This NASNTI grant and partnership with Western will provide a significant boost to initiatives recently put in place to address a growing shortage of nurses in Oklahoma. This initiative not only provides the ability to train more nurses, but address a critical shortage in rural and tribal areas of Oklahoma,” said Redlands Board of Regents Chair Janie Thompson. “The academic support and recruitment elements included in this grant go beyond providing additional training positions for nursing students, but also provides for success.”

While targeted outreach and recruitment of adult students is the focal point of this grant program, there is also a need to provide more information about healthcare careers to youth, specifically Native American children. Through the creation of a Health Careers Edventure program, outreach about careers in healthcare will begin at earlier ages.

WOSC Board Chair Debbie Cox added, “As we saw during the COVID pandemic and continue to see to this day, our healthcare system cannot operate effectively without quality nurses. Western Oklahoma State College is proud to be one of the state institutions that is a pipeline for this essential career field. The NASNTI grant with Redlands is a wonderful way to join forces and expand our current efforts.”

This five-year grant is designed for Native American and low-income students, and is 100% funded by the U.S. Department of Education as part of the Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institution (NASNTI) program.

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