



BERNALILLO COUNTY METROPOLITAN COURT URBAN NATIVE AMERICAN HEALING TO WELLNESS COURT

**Adult Tribal Healing to
Wellness Courts**

January 6-9, 2026

www.WellnessCourts.org
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DO'S AND DON'TS: THE LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED



DISCLAIMER

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A Native American operated non-profit:

Dedicated to providing free publication resources, comprehensive training, and technical assistance for Native nations and tribal justice systems in pursuit of our vision to empower Native communities to create and control their own institutions for the benefit of all community members, now, and for future generations.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn about the Urban Native American Healing to Wellness Court Program.
2. Examine program evolution.
3. Review lessons learned.
4. Discuss program integrity and sustainability.
5. Discuss continued program improvement.



► *Our Team*



TEAM UNITY

- Unity is vital to success
- Regular communication: e-mail, staffing, planning meetings
- Annual Team Retreats
- Quarterly Planning Meetings
- Mutual respect of roles
- Training for all team members
- Agreeing to disagree



PROGRAM EVOLUTION

- Address participants needs / health and well-being
- Improve chances for success
- Adhere to best and evidence-based practices
- Comply with state certification requirements
- Address negative trends
- Increase participation in traditional wellness component
- Promote involvement in pro-social activities



PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Screening potential participants for program acceptance
- Non-readiness for change and treatment
- Dilute test results
- Honesty and accountability - curbing criminogenic thinking
- Promoting concept of individualized treatment and sanctions
- Transition to life after the program / reduce recidivism
- Graduate speech content
- Addressing issues that affect “program integrity”



PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES

- Health and wellness re-assessment after six (6) months
- Contracts address disruptive behavior or non-engagement
- Participant required to submit graduation speech for review



CHANGES TO PHASE REQUIREMENTS

- Phase 1 reduced from 90 to 60 days
- Employment not required in Phase 1
- Restart sobriety date for dilute tests
- Change from “Aftercare Phase” to Phase 5 (best practices)
- At least one traditional wellness session per week required
- Prosocial activities and peer support groups required in Phases 4 and 5



ADDRESSING NON-COMPLIANCE

COURT SANCTIONS

- Community Service weed & litter
- Restart sobriety date
- In-office reprimand
- Travel suspended
- Called last at court hearings
- Increased testing
- SCRAM Device
- Increased court/probation visits
- Meet with Case Manager

SERVICE ADJUSTMENTS

- Behavioral Chain Analysis
- Treatment modifications: Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP), Seeking Safety
- In-patient treatment
- Peer support groups
- Group adjustments
- Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) referral
- Psychiatric referral
- Referral to outside agency



Lessons Learned: Incentives That Worked

- Participant Praise
- All Star Board/Drawing
- Travel request granted
- Phase Advancement Certificates
- Nameplate added to Honorary Wall of Graduates



Lessons Learned: Incentives and Sanctions That Did Not Work

INCENTIVES

- Skipping a court session or probation office visit
- Virtual hearings for new participants

SANCTIONS

- Paper on how to avoid dilute
- Not imposing sanctions sooner



LESSONS LEARNED: WELLNESS COURT SUPERVISION

- Communicate frequently with the Wellness Court team
- Provide extra structure and support in Phases 1 and 2
- Balance empathy with intensive supervision
- Be attentive to any subtle changes to participant demeanor
- Acknowledge that cultural needs are equally important



PROGRAM INTEGRITY & SUSTAINABILITY

- Address issues that affect participant morale
- Accept only High Risk/High Need candidates
- Redirect participants who encourage criminogenic behaviors
- Monitor incidents of triangulation
- Prohibit participants from engaging in inappropriate behavior
- Redirect participants who discuss sanctions in group settings



ADHERENCE TO BEST PRACTICES

- Meet participants where they are
- Limit jail time to no more than six (6) days total
- Individualized treatment - convey often to participants
- Holistic delivery of services
- In-office praise and incentives
- Addressing compliance issues timely
 - Court hearings twice per week: Monday/Thursday
- Communicate proximal vs. distal goals



ADHERENCE TO STATE LAW

New Mexico legalized recreational & medical cannabis use in 2024 and treated as a medical prescription

- Required changes to Wellness Court



CONTINUING PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

- Honesty, integrity and accountability
- Focus on phase objectives per new standards
- Careful screening of potential participants
- Increased peer support throughout program
- Issues concerning high risk/high need population
- Morbidity risks among population: family deaths, health issues
- Obtaining criminal history from Tribal jurisdictions





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THANK YOU!

