

Homeopaths Without Borders

Brings it HOME

Community clinic serves the Wabanaki Confederacy in rural Maine

Homeopaths Without Borders (HWB) is known for helping people in Haiti, Sri Lanka, and under-resourced areas around the world since 1996. After earthquakes and tsunamis, HWB has responded with humanitarian relief, homeopathic care, and local practitioner training. Now, this charitable organization is turning its attention to the U.S.



Homeopathy Today spoke with Holly Manoogian, CCH, Executive Director of HWB, to learn about their latest effort to serve Native American communities in rural Maine.

Nicole Altvater (*Nibezun Executive Director*) and Holly Manoogian (*HWB Executive Director*) meet to plan a community clinic at Nibezun on sacred Wabanaki land in Maine.

After 25 years helping people around the globe, what prompted HWB to focus on Maine?

People had been asking for our services in the U.S. and Canada—and Maine chose us. Also, Maine recently passed Health Freedom laws, which removes some regulatory hurdles to offering homeopathic services there.

How did your partnership with Indigenous people develop?

When the COVID-19 pandemic exploded, it revealed many of the consequences of Indigenous communities' lack of access to health care. Health disparities that result in disease are influenced by many factors, including inadequate funding, a shortage of health providers, and lack of transportation.

While tribal communities in Maine have a network of health services available, they may still find them culturally incompatible. They know, of course, that health is related to physical well-being. But for many Indigenous people, health is also very connected to family, community, and nature. They use medicine to support physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional balance in their lives. As homeopaths, we share this understanding of health and disease.

What steps did you take to get this project off the ground?

A group of Maine homeopaths met to discuss the potential for a community clinic for Native Americans. One homeopath knew a board member of Nibezun, a non-profit organization that

represents the Wabanaki Confederacy of five tribal nations in Maine. Nibezun resides on sacred Wabanaki land along the Penobscot River. The word “Nibezun” translates as “medicine” in the Penobscot language, with its root “nibi” meaning “water” or “the first medicine.” Nibezun describes itself as “a place where we celebrate culture as medicine, provide an inclusive space for healing, and promote sustainability for all people and future generations.” Aware of the multi-generational trauma that has impacted tribal nations, Nibezun focuses on healing and change.

We first presented our clinic idea to Nibezun's Executive Director, discussed HWB's history and intentions, and began visualizing ways to introduce homeopathy to the community. Then we

We aim to integrate homeopathy into the Indigenous community's health care system.

prepared a proposal for HWB to collaborate with Nibezun. We took small steps. For example, we proposed introducing services to only one of the five local tribal nations, and then eventually expanding the project to the others.

The president of the Nibezun Board, a medical doctor and Clinical Director of the Penobscot Indian Health Center for Indian Island, was very supportive and encouraged the clinic's development. When the Nibezun Board agreed to proceed with a homeopathic clinic, community-wide support increased. For this kind of venture, community support is what drives the project development.

How is this project like HWB's Haiti projects?

We began in Haiti by providing disaster relief care. One day, a nurse asked, "Can't you teach us to do this?" We followed her guidance on how to integrate our services into the community and teach homeopathy. In Haiti, as with Nibezun in Maine, the people already have a relationship to traditional medicine, so homeopathy is a close fit. When the Haitian Ministry of Health saw our curriculum, they encouraged us to work with the Haitian Medical Society to teach its members how to use homeopathy, which we did. After ten years of teaching and providing hundreds of mobile clinic days in Haiti, we know our systems are efficient and effective.

Our work in Maine is evolving in a similar way. After conveying our basic intention, we followed the community's lead. Trust built as we continued to respond and grow the partnership. The initial proposal was to offer mobile clinics, but because of the pandemic, we switched to telehealth clinics to minimize face-to-face interaction.

What are the respective responsibilities of HWB and Nibezun?

For service delivery, we will rely on a team of volunteer homeopaths assembled by HWB. HWB's Lauren Fox, FNP-BC, CCH, will take the lead on clinical direction, and I will focus on structures, systems, and logistics. Homeopathic pharmacies are generously donating remedies for our dispensary.

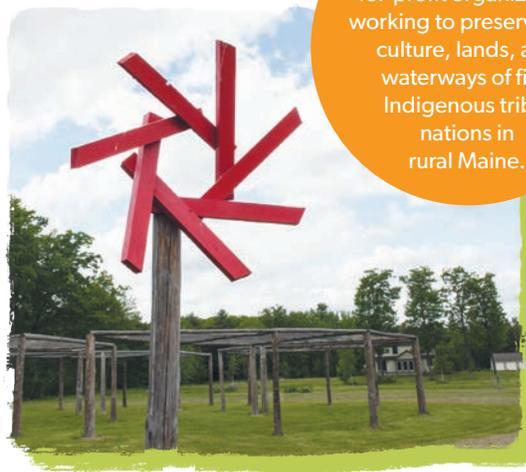
Nibezun convened an advisory committee to guide the clinic's design and

integration into the community. It's a well-rounded, intergenerational team, which I think is great, and it includes people from the Indian Health Services clinic, a counseling service, the court system, and other parts of the community.

To what extent does funding affect the continuity of services?

Everything that HWB has accomplished is thanks to thousands of hours that volunteers have contributed. So the bulk of the support for this project is from the generous homeopaths in Maine who will donate their consulting services one day a month.

When we estimated we needed \$11,000 to \$20,000 for other aspects of the project in the first year, Nibezun approached two state-wide, community-based foundations. We wrote the proposals together and both



The logo of Nibezun, a not-for-profit organization working to preserve the culture, lands, and waterways of five Indigenous tribal nations in rural Maine.

were accepted, with the funds awarded to Nibezun. We will rely on donations to cover any additional expenses. Getting support from state-level funding sources is wonderful, with the implication that these foundations recognize the value of homeopathy.

When do you expect to begin?

The first community clinic is set for August 4, 2021. Nibezun has hired a local Clinic Manager. The rest of the team will work remotely. Before we begin, we will have a community-wide presentation. We'll give a brief introduction about homeopathy, and the Clinic Manager will let the community know how to access services. Nibezun, the Advisory Board members, and the Clinic Manager are the ambassadors for this project.

What is your long-term goal in Maine?

We aim to integrate homeopathy into the Indigenous community's health care system. We'll start small and monitor outcomes, identify resources needed, and provide education. As the partnership develops, we'll gain more understanding of particular community needs. Our long-term goal is to transition the clinic operation to the community, with local homeopaths and/or locally trained health care providers. We want to teach people the fundamentals of homeopathic care so they can become caregivers, similar to what we've done in Haiti.

Have you considered replicating this model in other areas?

Our projects are designed to be replicable. We are preparing a handbook for how to establish and run a free/low-cost community clinic. We will provide the steps required and the forms needed. This will be a stand-alone template, to be used with or without additional support from HWB. We've received inquiries about the possibility of starting clinics in many places, including Florida, New Mexico, Arizona, Alberta, British Columbia, and New York.

How can others get involved?

When you're trying to bring change, it takes financial resources and people power. Go to HWB's website and make a donation, and if you have time available, consider becoming a volunteer with HWB. www.hwbna.org

Do you have any final thoughts?

Trust is essential for developing health care projects. Indigenous communities have long had their guard up as a result of being betrayed and mistreated in the past. So, it's been a privilege to present something to the Wabanaki tribal nations that they can accept.

Why is this project different? I think it's because we first worked on creating trust, we took the time to learn about each other, and we worked together. HWB is here to offer its best and to keep doing that. 💧