

Community Health ‘continues to evolve’

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals editor

When most people in Grand Ronde hear the words, “Community Health,” they might think about medical transport services for Elder Tribal members.

However, what the department offers is much more than that, Community Health Manager Ali-sha Parks Shell said.

“We’ve been around a long time, nearly 20 years, and just continue to evolve,” she said.

Community Health is designed to help educate Tribal members about their health and instill methods for creating healthy lifestyles. Many activities involve both Tribal youth and Tribal Elders.

Parks Shell took the helm of the department in March and began to revamp its offerings to include more community-oriented services in addition to medical transport and medication management.

“We changed our format completely,” she said. “I knew we needed to be more in the community and I wanted to look at being proactive rather than reactive.”

One of the ways Parks Shell is accomplishing that goal is to coordinate with the Health & Wellness Department to do in-home wellness checks and to offer opportunities for people to gather together at the Tribal campus.

“Some Tribal members might think they are the only ones with blood pressure issues or diabetes, but if you show them they are not



Tribal Elder Melvin Schultz, left, gets his blood pressure taken by Ben Morris, a community health aide with the Tribe’s Community Health Department, during a home visit at Schultz’s home in Dallas on Wednesday, Jan. 10.

Photo by Michelle Alaimo

alone and there is a community out there to help, it reduces social isolation.” Parks Shell said. “We also do drop-in visits and check in on Tribal Elders just to make sure they are OK, and help them with resource connection and care coordination.”

Current offerings from Community Health include medical appointment and non-medical transportation, wellness visits, medication management, care coordination and socialization; as well as caregiver support services, an Elder exercise program, wellness activities and free Life Alert service for all Tribal Elders.

Additionally, Community Health offers home safety visits, car seat education and installation, and hospital post-discharge follow-up calls. Service is offered to all Tribal members living in Polk, Yamhill, Marion, Tillamook, Washington and Multnomah counties. The emergency room follow-up calls are offered to all Tribal members across the country.

During November 2023, the most current month statistics are available, Community Health served 158 clients and provided 431 home visits with a staff of seven.

“We want to help people with navigating their health care and provide a home visit that meets the needs of clients,” Parks Shell said.

Tribal Elder Melvin Schultz, 64, of Dallas has been receiving Community Health home visits for the past eight months after a lacerated kidney landed him in the emergency room.

He said the greatest benefits are having all of his medications managed and becoming more aware of his own health, and the steps he can take to improve it.

“Worrying about my medications and when it would run out was really creating anxiety for me,” Schultz said.

Now, Community Health Aide Ben Morris brings medications out during weekly visits to Schultz’s Dallas home.

During a recent visit, Morris took his blood pressure and helped Schultz apply a new blood sugar monitoring sensor to his arm.

“When I first started visiting, his blood sugar was out of control,” Morris said. “Now we have it under control. A lot of it is creating the right habits. ... We visit people based on their needs. A lot of what we do is advocate for them.”

Schultz said he feels much better than he did a year ago and now has a dog to help ensure he gets out for regular walks.

“After Ben started helping me, I told my brother to get on his list, too,” Schultz said. “My blood sugar has landed me in the hospital before. I welcome the assistance and I think this is one of the best programs you can have. If you don’t have good health, you can’t do much of anything. Good health is so important.”

New grants will expand services

Two 2023 grant awards will allow Community Health to expand its offerings. The first is a two-year, Indian Health Service dementia care grant. The Tribe has been awarded close to \$200,000 so far.

“We’re going to be hiring a new employee to oversee this and will be offering Elder workshops, community events, cognitive impairment testing, caregiver support and other resources,” Parks Shell said.

The other grant is a two-year, Administration for Community Living Elder Justice Innovation Grant. The Tribe was awarded \$185,000 thus far, which will be used to increase education regarding Tribal Elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

“We are deploying a task force to respond and want to create a closed-loop system with Adult Protective Services,” Parks Shell said. “That way, we know what the outcome was of any Elder abuse or neglect reports.”

For more information or to request Community Health services, contact communityhealth@grandronde.org or 503-879-2078. ■



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