



TOOLKIT:

Creating Accessible Family Care Spaces at Indigenous Cultural Events

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Presented by:

Montana Obstetrics &
Maternal Support (MOMS)



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MOMS PROGRAM INFORMATION AND FUNDING DISCLOSURE

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MOMS is a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funded maternal health innovations initiative aimed at elevating maternal health as a priority in Montana. MOMS is a collaboration between the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), Billings Clinic and the University of Montana's Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities.

Montana has concerning rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity. Racial and geographic disparities create siloes in maternal healthcare, negatively impacting outcomes for moms in Montana's rural and tribal communities. Cultural involvement is a protective factor for Indigenous individuals who experience behavioral health conditions, medical comorbidities, and other structural disparities. By improving access to safe and accessible opportunities for families to participate in cultural events, MOMS hopes to make "The Last Best Place" the first best place to build a family.

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POSITIONALITY & WELCOME



My name is Diona Buck. I am Nakoda and a member of the Fort Belknap Assiniboine Tribe. As an Indigenous Mother raising four beautiful children and serving as the MOMS Community Engagement Coordinator, my heart is deeply invested in the health and well-being of our families and the preservation of our cultural traditions.

Happening across Montana, an empowering initiative is unfolding within Indigenous communities-the Zaagi'idiwin Indigenous Full Spectrum Doula Training.

Rooted in cultural wisdom and guided by a vision of holistic care, these trainings are forging a path towards nurturing the sacred journey of giving life.

It is my hope that Indigenous Doulas in collaboration with Lactation Consultants, Community Spiritual Leaders, Elders, and Tribal programs who serve and are dedicated to the health and well-being of families and children will embrace and implement this guide into establishing Family Care Spaces at community events.

The Family Care Space is envisioned to be a sanctuary at cultural events where families, with infants and/or young children, can come into this space to care for their children's needs while receiving support, compassion, and care in a culturally-relevant manner.

May this guide serve as an inspiration for Indigenous birth workers community champions, other maternal child health programs to implement Family Care Spaces at cultural events within their communities. These spaces hold the potential to create inclusive environments that celebrate the holistic aspects of giving life while integrating traditional knowledge and practices into the care of families.

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF GUIDE FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The purpose of creating this guide to establishing Family Care Spaces at Indigenous cultural events is rooted in fostering inclusivity, preserving family cultural traditions, and promoting community well-being. Recognizing the significance of family bonds within Indigenous communities, this guide provides helpful recommendations/strategies on implementing and designing a Family Care Space that caters to the unique needs of families during cultural events. By offering practical insight into planning, design, and cultural considerations, this guide seeks to enhance the overall experience for families, ensuring they feel supported and valued. Additionally, this guide emphasizes the importance of community engagement, acknowledging the collaborative effort of Indigenous Community programs and members to ensure the success and sustainability of Family Care Spaces. Ultimately this guide serves as a resource to empower Indigenous Communities in creating environments that not only accommodate the diverse needs of families but also honor and celebrate Indigenous family values.

RECOGNIZE THE NEED AND IMPORTANCE

Indigenous cultural events, for example powwows, are vibrant gatherings that bring communities together to celebrate Indigenous heritage. At Indigenous cultural events, families play a vital role in preserving, transmitting, and celebrating cultural traditions and family values. Indigenous family values emphasize intergenerational connection of



traditional knowledge, customs, practices, and communal support. Concepts such as respect, gratitude, humility, honesty, and communal responsibility are embodied among families at Indigenous cultural events. Elders share their knowledge and children absorb these cultural teachings which reinforces a positive cultural-identity and instills a profound understanding of family values.

Against the backdrop of vibrant Indigenous cultural events, there is a pressing need for a designated family care space to address some of the unique needs families with young children and infants may encounter while attending an event. Infant feeding and diaper changing are common infant care needs. Parents who attend and participate at cultural events may face barriers when needing to tend to their infants needs. For example, mothers/birthing parents who breast/chest feed might prefer a private area that blocks the public view of feeding their baby.

Creating and establishing a designated Family Care Space at cultural events is not only a logistical necessity but is culturally imperative as the space aligns with Indigenous cultural values. The Family Care Space will contribute to a positive and enjoyable experience for families while promoting accessibility, comfort, and family-friendly engagement at cultural events.

STRENGTHS OF CREATING A SPACE

Having a designated space for families to tend to their infants needs creates an atmosphere that fosters a sense of belonging. Families who come into this shared space can gather, socialize, create support networks, and share experiences on parenting. Accommodating a Family Care Space where families can come together with their children holds significant importance as it aligns with Indigenous cultural values in various ways.

- 1. Intergenerational Connection:** This shared space is a place where generations can come together to connect on cultural traditions relevant to parenting. Elders are knowledge keepers on cultural traditions. Elders, parents, children, and community members can create kinships and have conversations and share knowledge on traditional practices.
- 2. Motherhood/Parenthood is Sacred:** Giving birth is a ceremonial time in Indigenous culture. Mothers and birthing people are viewed sacred by having the ability to bring new life into the world. Recognizing this journey as sacred and creating this space



sends a positive message to mothers, birthing people, and families. The space acknowledges the community's commitment to providing support at cultural events to families and their babies. Providing this space is honoring mothers and birthing people for their role.

- 3. Breastfeeding a Cultural Practice:** Breast/chest feeding is an Indigenous cultural tradition and is engrained in the history of Indigenous communities. The benefits of breast/chest feeding are profound and include increased connection and bonding between the lactating parent and baby; reduced risk of certain cancers for those who breastfeed; and reduced risk of ear infections and obesity for breast/chest fed children. Offering lactating parents, a comfortable and private space to nurse or express milk can help overcome potential lactation barriers. A Family Care Space can aid in achieving higher rates of exclusive breast/chest feeding through the first six months of an infant's life- an objective outlined in Healthy People 2030. This community support approach aligns with the broader public health initiatives that aim to improve maternal and child health and well-being.
- 4. Community Unity and Support:** providing these designated spaces helps strengthen communal support. Mothers, birthing parents, and families can gather, share experiences, and offer support to one another. This sense of communal unity helps form bonds and relationships. This will contribute to the overall sense of belonging and connectedness within the community.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES

SECTION 1 – ENGAGING COMMUNITY LEADERS AND PROGRAMS

“It takes a village to raise a child” is a phrase that originates from an African proverb but is also a commonly used term within Indigenous communities as well. The expression of the phrase encapsulates the profound cultural value of community responsibility in supporting parents and families in the child's development.

Providing this designated space at cultural events, such as powwows, is a thoughtful and inclusive initiative that recognizes the unique needs of families and children. Engaging community partners and members in supporting this space involves a combination of building relationships, communication, collaboration, and cultural sensitivity. Consider

some strategies below when initiating engagement with community members and partners:

1. Identify key stakeholders: Identify and reach out to key stakeholders in your community that provide services to Indigenous families and children such as the local:

- Women, Infants, and Children's (WIC)
- Tribal Health Departments
- Community health workers
- Tribal Colleges (Nursing, education, etc. departments)
- Childcare programs and immersion schools
- Indigenous lactation consultants
- Indian Health Service (IHS)
- Behavioral health programs
- Child and Family Services
- Early Head Start
- Parenting groups
- Doulas, and other birth workers
- Other programs as identified

These partners may be able to provide people and material resources to operate the Family Care Space and keep it full of necessary supplies.

2. Identify a project champion: Identify a champion to help lead the efforts in creating



this space. A champion is someone who has influence, connections, and enthusiasm for advocating for this space. Having a champion or two can help with engaging others, build buy-in, and address any challenges. Consider seeking support from influential community members, Elders, and/or spiritual leaders.

3. Develop a clear proposal/plan: Consider creating a proposal outlining the purpose and benefits of the designated Family Care Space. Clearly discuss how the Family Care Space initiative aligns with the mission and values of the individual community organizations that will be approached. *(See Appendix A - Support Letter to Community Partner/Members for an example)*

4. Highlight community impact: Emphasize the positive impact the Family Care Space will provide to the community, especially families, at cultural events. Discuss the potential to enhance the overall experience for families and the benefits of cultural engagement as a protective factor.

5. **Cultural sensitivity:** Address the importance of cultural preservation and family inclusivity, demonstrating how this Family Care Space initiative is rooted in cultural values.
6. **Schedule a meeting:** Reach out to the identified community stakeholders/champion to schedule a meeting either in-person or virtually. This could include but not limited to, executive directors, program managers, or community outreach coordinators. This will lead to discussion of potential partnerships based on the logistical needs of the space.
7. **Partnership Opportunities:** Discuss various partnership opportunities such as financial support, in-kind donations, or volunteering. Discuss the specific needs of the family care space, and how each organization can contribute.
8. **Provide previous similar initiatives/testimonial:** Share information about similar initiatives that have successfully been implemented at cultural events such as powwows in other communities. Share positive outcomes and community impact achieved through the involvement of community collaboration.
9. **Address concerns:** Be prepared to discuss any concerns or questions the various community partners and members may have. This could include logistical details, financial transparency, or cultural considerations. Anticipate and actively respond to potential inquiries.
10. **Follow up:** Follow up with community partners and members after the first initial meeting. Provide any additional information if needed and express gratitude for their consideration of being involved. Maintain open communication for community partners and members who are interested in participating in creating the designated Family Care Space. This could include coordinating additional planning meetings with the interested community partners and members to gather their input and perspectives and to discuss logistics on the implementation of creating this Family Care Space.
11. **Collaborate on outreach efforts:** Develop a communication plan to inform the community about the designated family care space at cultural events. Consider using multiple communication channels such as social media, community meetings, local newsletters, or a promotional flyer to help spread the word. (*See Appendix B: Communication Plan for an example*)

SECTION 2 – CREATING THE SPACE

1. **Location:** Designate the space to an area that is easily accessible and well-marked with appropriate signage for caregivers to find. Take into consideration the proximity of the space to the main event and to accessible restrooms (if available). Be thoughtful to make the space accommodating for individuals with mobility challenges, including those with strollers, wheelchairs or others disabilities.
2. **Designing the space:** When creating the space, consider providing privacy options for infant feeding and diaper changing. Having a tent/gazebo that has curtains, dividers, or partitions can offer caregivers sense of privacy while tending to their child's needs. At some events, it may be an option to offer a quieter environment for both adults and children with neurodivergence who prefer a less stimulating environment.



3. **Cultural inclusivity/considerations:** Incorporate tribal symbols, artwork, and design elements that are reflective to the specific Indigenous community hosting the event. This recognition creates an atmosphere that respects and honors the Indigenous tribal community's values and traditions.

SECTION 3 – RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

1. **Equipping the space:** Ensure the area is equipped with comfortable seating, diaper changing tables, and a sanitary area for diaper disposals. Consider providing amenities such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and clean water for nursing moms. Creating this family space is also an opportunity for community partners who serve families and their children to collaborate and donate amenities like diapers, wipes, snacks, and a small play area for older siblings.
2. **Educational material:** Consider displaying and disseminating local resources inside the Family Care Space that relates to maternal/perinatal health and child health. This is an opportunity to provide educational material to women and caregivers such as

brochures and handouts. Posters with lactation information can be hung in the space where visible to those who are nursing or bottle feeding their infant. The presence of the space provides opportunity and awareness about the importance of supporting caregivers and their infants within the community at cultural events. It can promote positive conversations around traditional parenting and values.

SECTION 4 – SIGNAGE

1. **Clear signage:** Ensure signage is clear, simple, informative, uses gender inclusive language, and is welcoming. Ensure signage is placed strategically, such as at the announcer stand or where families are likely to congregate.
2. **Universal breastfeeding symbol:** To help promote a breastfeeding-friendly environment, utilize the universal breastfeeding symbol which depicts nursing and a breast pump. (*See Appendix C: Universal Breastfeeding Symbol*)
3. **Culturally inclusive language:** Consider creating your own signage that reflects your Tribe(s) language. Ask a fluent speaker of your Tribe’s language to translate phrases such as “Breastfeeding Welcome Here”, “Mother and Baby Room”, “Family Care Space” or “Welcoming Families”.

SECTION 5 – STAFFING AND TRAINING

1. **Community support/volunteers:**

Consider collaborating with Indigenous community partners to volunteer their time to assist in maintaining the cleanliness and functionality of these spaces. Consider having an Indigenous doula, Indigenous lactation consultant, or a knowledgeable volunteer available during peak times of the event to offer support, answer questions, and ensure a positive experience for families.



2. **Create a volunteer network:** Recruit volunteers from the community to help staff the designated Family Care Space. Volunteers could include parents, grandparents, community partners, or individuals with experience in childcare. Consider providing a

training to volunteers so they are knowledgeable about the designated Family Care Space.

SECTION 6 – EVENT INTEGRATION

- 1. Incorporate space into event planning:** Reach out to event organizers or planning committees to integrate the Family Care Space into the overall event planning process in an intentional and accessible way. Request and ensure the Family Care Space is included on the event flyer and/or agenda.

SECTION 7 – EVALUATION

- 1. Feedback:** Consider implementing a system, such as a survey system, for attendees who visit the space to provide feedback on the designated Family Care Space. Feedback can be utilized to improve and adjust for future events. *(See Appendix D: Recommended Feedback Questions)*

APPENDIX A: SUPPORT LETTER TO COMMUNITY PARTNERS/MEMBERS

Dear Community Partner/Member,

I hope this letter finds you well. As valued members of our community who share a commitment to the well-being of families and children, I am writing to seek your support for an initiative that holds the potential to greatly enhance the inclusivity and enjoyment of cultural events for mothers, birthing people, and babies, and families.

In line with our commitment to the well-being of families and children, we invite you to support the establishment of creating a designated Family Care Space at cultural events. The space will be designed to cater to the specific needs of families with young children. We are excited to share this initiative with you, as we believe will significantly contribute to the success and inclusivity of families at cultural events within our community.

The Family Care Space will serve as a safe space for parents and guardians attending cultural events, offering a comfortable area equipped changing stations, comfortable seating, privacy curtains for nursing moms, clean water and other amenities to ensure that families with young children have a dedicated area for their needs. We envision this space not only as a practical solution for parents and guardians but also as a testament to the community's dedication to creating an environment where everyone, regardless of age, can fully participate and enjoy cultural activities.

We are reaching out to esteemed community partners such as your organization, as we believe your support can be instrumental in turning this proposal into a reality. Through community collaboration we can make a lasting positive impact on the inclusivity, accessibility and overall experience of families attending cultural events.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We are eager to discuss this proposal further and explore how we can work together to create a more family friendly environment at our community cultural events.

Best regards,

APPENDIX B: COMMUNICATION PLAN

Objective: To effectively inform the community about the newly established designated Family Care Space at cultural events, fostering a sense of inclusivity and enhance the overall experience for families.

Target Audience:

- Families with children
- Local community members
- Community Organizations and partners
- Event Attendees and potential participants

Communication Channels and Tactics:

1. Social Media:

- Utilize existing social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, to share information about the Family Care Space.
- Create engaging posts like pictures and graphics that can be shared that highlights the Family Care Space features and benefits.
- Encourage community members and partners to share the posts to increase awareness.

2. Community Bulletin Boards:

- Utilize local community bulletin boards in public spaces such as libraries, local businesses and community centers to post an informational flyer about the Family Care Space.
- Collaborate with community partners to share printed material in their location.

3. Word of Mouth:

- Utilize personal connections within the community to spread the word.
- Encourage community partners to inform their networks through casual conversations and community gatherings.

4. Community Meetings/Planning meetings for events:

- Attend local community meetings and events to share information about the Family Care Space.

- Request a brief speaking slot to discuss the initiative and its benefits.

Timeline:

- Initiate the communication plan 4-6 weeks before the upcoming cultural event of where the Family Care Space will be set up at.
- Continuously share information and announcements through the various communication channels leading up to and during the cultural event.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Monitor engagement on social media platforms such as reviewing comments, tracking the number of shares and likes.
- Collect anecdotal feedback from community partners and members.
- Utilize community cultural events as opportunities for direct interaction and feedback gathering.

APPENDIX C: UNIVERSAL BREASTFEEDING SYMBOL



<https://universalbreastfeedingsymbol.com/download/>

APPENDIX D: RECOMMENDED FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

Below you will find some example questions when seeking feedback to evaluate a Family Care Space at Indigenous cultural events.

1. How satisfied are you with the availability of the Family Care Space at this cultural event?
2. Did you find the Family Care Space easily accessible and well-marked within the event?
3. How satisfied are you with the cleanliness and hygiene of the family care space?
4. Were the amenities within the family care space, such as changing table and feeding areas, suitable for your needs?
5. Did you feel there were any specific amenities or services you feel were lacking in the family care space?
6. How satisfied were you with the friendliness and helpfulness of the volunteer present in the family care space?
7. Did you feel welcomed and comfortable in the family care space as an attendee of the cultural event?
8. Do you have any recommendations or suggestions for improving the family care space at future cultural events?

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