

GLITEC GAZETTE

News From the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Epidemiology Center Fall 2023

Boozhoo! Greetings from the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Epidemiology Center (GLITEC)! This fall 2023 newsletter highlights our latest news and updates. Our quarterly newsletters are posted on the [GLITC](#) and [Bemidji Area Emergency Response](#) websites. To receive our newsletters and other updates in your inbox, [sign up](#) for emails on topics you care about, such as events, news alerts, reports, and funding opportunities.



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A Message From GLITEC Director Will Funmaker

In the ongoing battle against health disparities and substance use within Native American communities, GLITEC has been at the forefront of innovative approaches and data-driven solutions. Over the last few months, GLITEC has been actively engaged in two critical initiatives: data linkage projects and opioid assistance. Both are aimed at improving the health and well-being of Tribal populations.

GLITEC recognizes the importance of comprehensive data to inform evidence-based public health interventions. Its data linkage projects involve the integration of external datasets, allowing for a more holistic understanding of health trends among Native American communities. By connecting information from various sources at the state and national level, GLITEC can better assess the impact of health programs, identify gaps in care, and develop tailored interventions to address specific health issues while getting the needed data to Tribes throughout the Great Lakes area.

These projects are essential for understanding the unique challenges faced by Tribal populations, such as diabetes, heart disease, and maternal health disparities. The data linkage efforts empower Tribes with accurate, localized data that can drive policy decisions and improve health care access. *[continued page 2]*

The opioid epidemic has deeply affected Tribal communities disproportionately, underscoring the urgency of GLITEC's opioid initiatives. Over the past few months, GLITEC has been actively studying opioid use patterns and implementing harm reduction strategies by distributing naloxone with kits to Tribes in need to address this crisis.

Our work includes collaborating with Tribal health departments to develop culturally sensitive prevention and treatment programs. By tailoring interventions to the specific needs of Tribal communities, GLITEC is making strides in reducing opioid-related harm and increasing access to substance use treatment.

GLITEC's commitment to data linkage projects and opioid research is a testament to its dedication to improving the health and well-being of Native American populations in the region and beyond. By harnessing the power of data and culturally informed strategies, GLITEC is taking concrete steps toward reducing health disparities and ensuring a brighter, healthier future for Tribal communities in the Great Lakes region.

GLITEC Receives New Funding to Strengthen Tribal Public Health Systems

Written by: Christina Denslinger, PhD

In August 2023, GLITEC was awarded funding through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's **Strengthening Public Health Systems and Services in Indian Country cooperative agreement**. GLITEC is one of 26 federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native Tribes and Tribally designated organizations to receive this five-year funding. The cooperative agreement focuses on strengthening the Tribal public health systems that are central to reducing health disparities in Tribal communities.

GLITEC's Strengthening Public Health program will identify and address barriers related to Tribal public health data and improve the ability of public health systems to develop, deliver, and evaluate programs and services. It will do this by creating a strategic foundation on which to not only develop solutions in interoperability and data governance, but also build capacity and resources for Tribal public health programs and services. This work will support community-led efforts to:

- address social determinants of health
- tackle challenges within Tribal public health organizational systems and infrastructure to reduce health disparities
- enhance capacity to prevent disease, promote health, and prepare for and respond to emerging threats and chronic disease.

Additionally, supplemental funding was available to recipients of the initial five-year funding. In September 2023, GLITEC was one of 21 recipients that received supplemental funding. Through the **Tribal Opioid Prevention** project, GLITEC aims to advance Tribal overdose surveillance, increase access to overdose prevention programs that address health disparities and social determinants of health, and improve overdose outcomes and reduce health disparities. As part of the project, GLITEC plans to offer competitive funding to support communities in developing, implementing, or evaluating overdose prevention programs and initiatives.

GLITEC looks forward to working with and supporting Tribal communities in strengthening public health systems and services. If you have any questions about GLITEC's new grant program, contact Christina Denslinger, Strengthening Public Health Systems and Services Program Director, at cdenslinger@glitc.org.

Order Materials for Tribal/Urban Indian Clinics

GLITEC is able to provide many publications and materials at no cost. These are available to all IHS, Tribal, and Urban Indian (I/T/U) clinics in the Bemidji Area (Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Chicago).

If interested in ordering items, please fill out the order form(s) below:

- [Order Form](#) – HIV Materials
- [Order Form](#) – Fentanyl Factsheets and Test Strips
- [Order Form](#) – COVID-19, Flu, and Immunization Publications and Materials



Lac du Flambeau Hosts Regional Gathering to Strengthen Prevention and Support Wellness

On August 15-17, the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians hosted the **Strengthening Prevention and Sharing Best Practices to Support Behavioral Health and Wellness** gathering to support strengthening Tribal prevention efforts. This gathering was a collaborative effort between Lac du Flambeau, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and other federal partners. It was open to all those interested or involved in behavioral health, Tribal action planning, and prevention in the Bemidji Area (Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Chicago).

The gathering had four main objectives:

- Assessing regional challenges and impact of substance use, misuse, and overdose rates
- Recommend and review deferral resources for Tribes and Tribal organizations to support their efforts in reducing the effects of substance use and the opioid epidemic
- Examine federal updates to the Tribal Law and Order Act, including prevention and treatment resources available through the Office of Indian Alcohol and Substance Abuse
- Review evidence-based practices and apply community-based practices in support for training and technical assistance to maintain momentum in Tribal action plans to address substance use and misuse

Throughout the three days together, Tribal communities collaborated to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and participated in a World Café with federal partners. Attendees shared resources and best practice prevention and interventions to heal from substance use and promote health and wellness, and they discussed social media as a prevention and wellness tool. Tribes and Tribal organizations also engaged in the process of action plan development. *[continued page 4]*

On day two, GLITEC, in partnership with IHS, facilitated a session around current opioid-related data and related challenges. As part of this session, GLITEC provided an overview of the current data on opioid use, overdose, and mortality within the Bemidji Area and discussed challenges impacting data availability, access, and quality. In addition, GLITEC highlighted available resources and services to improve Tribal data and systems.

Additionally, communities shared the cultural wellness and prevention efforts they have engaged in. In particular, the Lac du Flambeau Native Connections program shared the amazing work they are doing to support healing and wellness within their community.

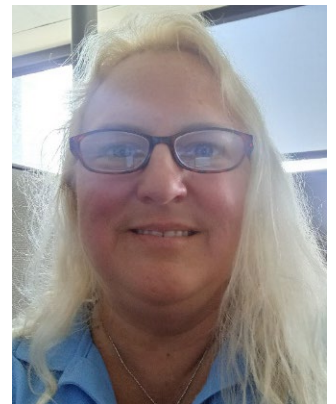
Through their time together, communities were able to connect with each other, share ideas, and work toward solutions to identified challenges. Thank you to the Lac du Flambeau Tribe for organizing and hosting the gathering and to all the federal partners and facilitators who helped plan, coordinate, and facilitate. GLITEC is here to support your prevention work and data needs. Please reach out if you have any questions or would like assistance.

Say *Hello* to Our New Team Members!

The Epidemiology Center recently welcomed seven new members to our team. Please welcome Nicole Gredenius, Public Health Specialist; Dr. Kade Lenz, Program Director; Jyostnasri Mogili, Public Health Specialist; Idris Mohamed, Epidemiologist; Sakshitha Mukta, Epidemiologist; Sheaffer Rafto, Epidemiologist; and Afif Showkat, Public Health Specialist, to the Epidemiology Center!

Nicole Gredenius, MPH, MA – Public Health Specialist

I am Nicole Gredenius; however, I usually go by Nikki. I am new to the GLITEC staff. I am from northern Illinois, more specifically Rockton, northwest of Rockford, Illinois. I recently graduated with a second master's in public health with a certification in epidemiology. I also hold a master's in sociology from Western Illinois University and 66 hours in cognitive psychology from Grand Canyon University. I am happy and proud to be a Public Health Specialist with GLITEC and look forward to meeting more members of this great organization.



I am currently located in the Madison, Wisconsin, satellite office at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My role at GLITEC is working with the Good Health and Wellness in Indian Country (GHWIC) grant and the Indian Health Service (IHS) Epidemiology Cooperative Agreement to provide technical assistance to Tribes as needed and to engage in public health practice, the planning and creation of grants, health communication strategies, and educational/intervention programming.

I love reading and have an extensive personal library at home. I enjoy spending time with my very awesome family, which is my son, mom, brother and his wife, and my niece and nephew.

Kade Lenz, PhD, MPH – IHS Cooperative Agreement Program Director

Hello everyone. My name is Kade Lenz, and I am excited to join GLITEC as the Program Director for the Indian Health Service (IHS) Epidemiology Cooperative Agreement and the Drinking Water Testing Program. I joined this team at our satellite office in Minneapolis at the Indian Health Board (IHB) office.

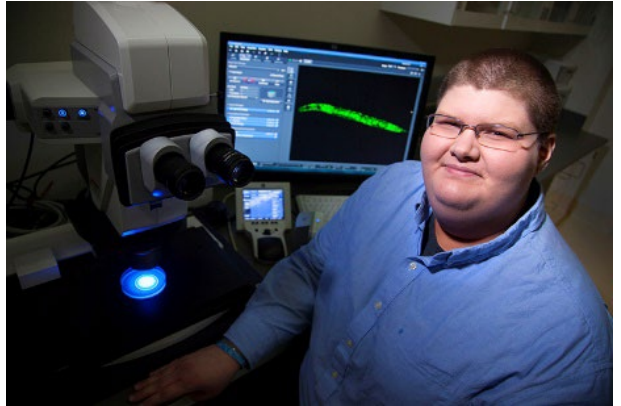
I was born and raised in Wisconsin, where my love for freshwater sciences and environmental health blossomed. This love led me to pursue my undergraduate degree in biology at St. Norbert College (SNC) in De Pere, Wisconsin. At SNC, I was introduced to public health and epidemiology, which led me to further my education in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM).

At UWM, I obtained my master's degree in public health and my doctorate in environmental health sciences. As a graduate student, I worked with the Milwaukee Health Department Laboratory and Epidemiologist on projects in infectious disease, lead, and food and water quality. This experience solidified my passion for public health. Additionally, I conducted research focusing on environmental toxicology, freshwater science, risk assessment, and environmental epidemiology.

After completing my graduate work, I transitioned to working with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and Door County Public Health on the COVID-19 response. I worked on establishing and expanding Wisconsin's initial vaccine campaign, conducting surveillance, analyzing data, and working with community stakeholders. I learned a great deal from this experience, especially from my colleagues and the community.

In my free time, I enjoy exploring nature and learning new skills. I love exploring the outdoors with my 8-year-old dog, Mandy, who has an obsession with finding new rocks on our adventures. Additionally, I enjoy being crafty and painting in my free time.

I look forward to learning and working with the GLITEC/GLITC team and the community.



Jyostnasri Mogili, PharmD, MS – Public Health Specialist

Hello everyone! My name is Jyostnasri Mogili, but you can call me Jyo for short. I am grateful to join GLITEC as a Public Health Specialist at the satellite office in Minneapolis at the University of Minnesota. My ancestral roots are from India. I was born and raised in Andhra Pradesh, which is located in south India and where family lives. I completed my doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) in India and later came to the U.S. for my master's in health informatics at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI).

Being in a health care sector and providing my service to people was always my first choice, and I have participated in many rural service programs and medical camps back in India. After coming to the U.S., I didn't get a chance to work on such programs. But, with GLITEC, I feel I am on the right track in my career. I am grateful to be a part of improving the quality of life for all Native people and being part of GLITEC. My career goal is to work in an organization where my skill and passion for work can impact the quality of care for patients.

I have an extroverted personality and am outgoing, friendly, genuine, and good at social interactions. I am open to innovative ideas, being passionate about learning new things in life. I incline more toward the positive side of life daily and look for positive outcomes in life. At the same time, I have a strong ability to cope and bounce back from challenges and adversities. I value integrity in work and being ethical, loyal, and trustworthy to my workplace.

In my free time, I enjoy spending time with my friends and family. I love to travel and explore new places and cultures around the world. I am a foodie and love to try different cuisines. I am excited to work at GLITEC and am looking forward to learning and supporting the work at GLITEC.



Idris Mohamed, MPH – Epidemiologist

Hi everyone. My name is Idris Mohamed, and I'm thrilled to be working at GLITEC in the Minneapolis IHB satellite office as an Epidemiologist. Although I grew up in Kenya, I was born in Somalia. I received a bachelor's degree in health and exercise science with a minor in public health from Syracuse University. For the first year of my master's degree in public health, I attended George Washington University. However, I transferred to the University of Minnesota to complete my studies and obtain my master's in public health with an emphasis on epidemiology and global health.

My interest in public health and desire to help others improve health outcomes through community-based research and education stemmed from my experiences working with people with disabilities in Hanoi, Vietnam; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; and Tucson, Arizona. I also worked at multiple federally qualified health centers, serving the underprivileged communities in Minneapolis. I look forward to learning from the communities that GLITEC serves while supporting our mission statement.

I enjoy watching and playing sports, particularly soccer and basketball. I support Liverpool and AC Milan. A dream of mine is to witness a Liverpool game at Anfield in England one day. I also like traveling and learning about different cultures.

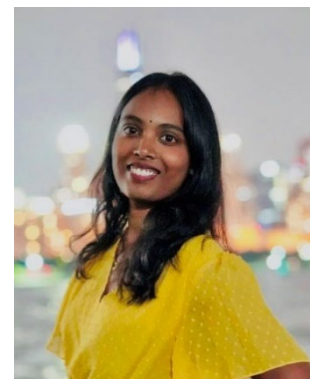
P.S. - You'll never walk alone.

Sakshitha Mukta, MS – Epidemiologist

Hello, I'm Sakshitha Mukta, and I'm passionate about epidemiology and public health. I hold a master's degree in clinical epidemiology from Kent State University, where I had the privilege of delving into the intricacies of disease patterns, research methodologies, and the vital role of epidemiology in improving public health.

My journey in epidemiology began with an internship at the local health department, where I gained hands-on experience in epidemiological investigations, data analysis, and public health interventions. This experience reinforced my interest in making a meaningful impact on disease prevention and control.

Before venturing into epidemiology, I pursued a bachelor's degree in dentistry in India and practiced as a dentist for a year. This clinical background provides me with a unique perspective on health care, which complements



my epidemiological expertise. Infectious diseases have always intrigued me, and I am driven to contribute to our understanding of these diseases and the development of effective strategies to combat them. My goal is to utilize my skills and knowledge to improve public health and contribute to a healthier and safer world.

I look forward to furthering my career in epidemiology and collaborating with others who share my passion for public health. Together, we can make a positive impact on the health and well-being of communities worldwide.

In summary, my happiness in joining GLITEC is deeply rooted in the opportunity to do work that aligns with my passion and values, collaborate with a dedicated team, and make a positive impact on the health and well-being of Native communities. I look forward to the challenges, growth, and successes ahead as part of this exceptional organization.



Sheaffer Rafto, MPH – Epidemiologist

Hi! My name is Sheaffer Rafto, and I am ecstatic to join GLITEC as an Epidemiologist in the Minneapolis satellite office at the University of Minnesota. I am originally from Honolulu but went to Boston University for both my undergraduate degree in human physiology and, more recently, my master's degree in public health, focusing on epidemiology and biostatistics. While I may be new to the Midwest, I am excited to experience a true winter, explore a new city, and enjoy all the things the Great Lakes region has to offer.

My passion for public health stems from the Introduction to Public Health course I took during my undergraduate studies. A close friend had recommended the course, and from that point on, I fell in love with public health. The next step for me felt natural as I continued to pursue a master's in public health focused on epidemiology and biostatistics. While obtaining my MPH, I took a wide variety of courses that covered different subfields of epidemiology, such as infection diseases, social epidemiology, and pharmacoepidemiology, as well as statistical computing courses to learn how to analyze data for the purpose of informing health behavioral changes, policy, and law. Additionally, I worked as a student teaching assistant for the social epidemiology course and conducted research on predicting the need for mental health services following a natural disaster.

In my free time, I enjoy spending time outdoors running, biking, hiking, and playing soccer, but I also make time to bundle up and read a book or watch a movie. My favorite movie is Inception. I watch sports from time to time but prefer the social aspect more and typically stick to baseball or soccer. My favorite teams are the Boston Red Sox (baseball) and Real Madrid (soccer). I look forward to working with everyone and learning more about the health programs and services in the communities we serve!

Afif Showkat, MSPH, BA – Public Health Specialist

Hello, everyone! I'm Afif Showkat, and I couldn't be more excited about becoming a part of the GLITEC team as a Public Health Specialist in the Madison satellite office. I hail from Memphis, Tennessee, a city known for Elvis Presley, fantastic music, and mouthwatering barbecue. Fun fact: I was born just around 20 miles away from the White House in Fairfax, Virginia!

I'm a proud American-born Bangladeshi, with both my parents originating from Bangladesh and later making their home in the United States. In terms of my education, I graduated from Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, in May



2021, where I earned a Bachelor of Arts in general communication. This May, I reached another milestone by graduating from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine with a Master of Science in public health, specializing in environmental health sciences. My journey has been filled with exciting experiences, and I can't wait to bring my passion for public health to GLITEC.

For as long as I can recall, my overarching desire has been to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. Initially, I was drawn to the field of medicine, but my college science courses didn't quite resonate with me. However, during my time in graduate school, my passion took a different turn, leading me to develop a deep fascination with public health. Since then, my affection for public health has only grown stronger.

Public health offers a multitude of avenues to pursue the goal of enhancing people's well-being. I've found my passion in areas such as infectious diseases, environmental health, mental health, and health equity. Despite my unwavering commitment to public health, my interest in medicine remains very much alive. I've consciously kept the door open to the possibility of attending medical school soon, as my dedication to improving health care continues.

During my time in graduate school, I had the incredible privilege of serving as a Behavioral Health Technician in Louisiana. My role involved imparting essential skills such as reading, writing, and social development to children with special needs. One particularly remarkable experience occurred when I had the chance to present my work at the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) conference in Denver this past July. The conference revolved around the intricate factors influencing children's mental well-being, focusing on social and environmental determinants. This newfound knowledge kindled my passion for making a difference in underserved communities. It was around this moment that I first heard about GLITEC's commendable efforts to enhance the health of Native Americans. My excitement was matched by a strong desire to extend my assistance to minority groups in need, as I had seen firsthand the positive impact of such efforts during my time as a Behavioral Health Technician. This drive to help marginalized communities, just like the Native American population, continues to be a driving force in my career.

One thing that truly defines me is my unwavering passion for travel, which aligns perfectly with this role. Throughout my life, I've embarked on journeys across the United States, immersing myself in diverse attractions, cultures, cuisines, people, traditions, and more. In fact, Wisconsin marks the 40th state I've had the privilege to explore since I moved here just over a month ago. My life goal is to set foot in all 50 states and expand my adventures to international destinations. Although my international travel experiences are somewhat limited at this point, I'm optimistic that will change in the future.

Aside from my wanderlust, I find immense joy in exploring new places, maintaining an active lifestyle by hitting the gym, indulging in soccer matches, and avidly following various sports. I can confidently call myself a true sports enthusiast: Name a sport, and there's a good chance I'm an enthusiastic spectator.



Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council Epidemiology Center

Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc.
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glitc.org/programs/epidemiology-and-education

Our Mission

To support Tribal communities in their efforts to improve health by assisting with data needs through partnership development, community-based research, education, and technical assistance.

Apple Cranberry Pecan Wild Rice Pilaf

Ingredients:

- 1 cup uncooked wild rice
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries
- 2 cups chicken bone broth
- 2 cups apple juice
- 1/4 tsp oregano
- 1/4 tsp black pepper
- 1/4 tsp thyme
- 1+1 Tbsp. sunflower oil
- 1 Granny Smith apple peeled, cored, and diced
- 3 cloves garlic minced
- 1/2 cup pecans chopped

**Cooking Instructions:**

1. Combine wild rice, cranberries, bone broth, apple juice, oregano, black pepper, thyme, and 1 tablespoon sunflower oil in medium pot and simmer on medium-low heat until liquid is gone (about 55 minutes).
2. Peel, core, and dice apple and set aside.
3. Chop pecans.
4. Add 1 tablespoon sunflower oil to frying pan. Add apple chunks, pecans, and minced garlic. Cook for 5 minutes or until soft.
5. Add wild rice mixture and stir to mix evenly.
6. Serve warm. Enjoy!

Recipe courtesy of Indigikitchen.

www.indigikitchen.com/apple-cranberry-pecan-wild-rice-pilaf