



Sage News

Bee lá'í dli (Together/Unity) | Hodíłzin (Sacred) | Hózhó (Beauty/Balance) | Í'íłj (Respect)

Sage Memorial Hospital announces reopening of surgical services after nearly 20 years

GANADO, Ariz. - Sage Memorial Hospital (SMH) is proud to announce the reopening of its surgical services department. The department, which has been closed since 2006, resumed operations with its first procedure—a colonoscopy and endoscopy—on the morning of January 21. This milestone marks a historic return to surgical services, ending a nearly 20-year hiatus in the hospital's general surgery department having ceased operations due to facility challenges and regulatory issues. "This launch is a major milestone for our community," said Dr. Kenneth Anaeme, Chief Medical Officer at Sage Memorial Hospital. "After years without local surgical options, we're bringing these essential services back home." The reopening follows a year of intensive preparation since the hospital's move to its new state-of-the-art facility in December 2024. The new unit will initially focus on outpatient procedures, allowing patients to receive high-quality surgical care and return home the same day. "For our relatives (patients), this is going to be a significant benefit and convenience," Anaeme added. "We generally have on average about 10 to 15 referrals for endoscopic procedures every



PHOTO - State-of-the-art operating room at Sage Memorial Hospital, ready for advanced surgical procedures

month going out, and these relatives are going out to Flagstaff, and to Phoenix, and recently, we have been unable to secure endoscopies at Flagstaff because they are booked. So, this will stop once we open up because our relatives (patients) will be able to get these procedures done right here at Sage." Dr. Anaeme outlined SMH's phased "crawl, walk, run" approach which will begin with outpatient procedures like colonoscopies and esophagogastroduodenoscopies (EGDs). Emergency surgeries are anticipated within a year, transforming SMH into a 24/7 surgical unit. Key personnel

include Dr. David Johnson as head of surgery services, Dr. Roger Hucek (also performing surgeries), and Dr. Swarnjit Singh (gastroenterologist). In addition, future partnerships with Creighton University Medical Center, will support expanded advanced daytime surgeries once fully operational, Anaeme explains.

For more information, please contact the Sage Memorial Hospital at (928) 755-4500 or visit our website at www.sagememorial.com for the latest updates, procedure details, and patient resources.

Sage board member's message



Maybelle Kelewood
Board Member,
Sage Memorial
Hospital

My name is Maybelle Kelewood
Ádóone'é nishííngíí 'éí
Áshjini nishíł
Deeshii'nii éí báhshishchíín
Tódich'ii'nii dashicheii
Táchii'níí éí dashinálí
I am honored to serve as a board member and to represent my community. My commitment is to uphold our values, foster trust, and work collaboratively to strengthen Sage Memorial Hospital for future generations.

As a board member, I approach each decision with humility and respect for the wisdom of our elders, the needs of our families, and the traditions that shape our community. I believe that maintaining clear communication and transparency will help us build lasting relationships among staff, Relatives (patients), and the broader community.

In addition, I am passionate about supporting initiatives that promote wellness, education, and cultural preservation within our hospital and its outreach programs. My goal is to ensure that every decision we make reflects the needs and aspirations of our community, while prioritizing patient-centered care and staff well-being.

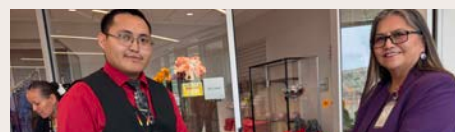
Through my role, I have witnessed firsthand the dedication and resilience of our healthcare team, as well as the strength of our Relatives (patients) and their families. I am inspired by the progress we have made together, from expanding essential medical services to enhancing community outreach and education programs. These accomplishments reaffirm my belief in the power of collective action and the importance of honoring both tradition and innovation.



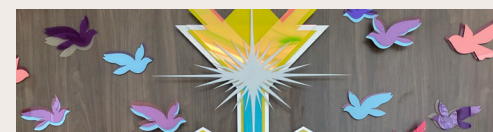
Sage Dental gets new 3D technology upgrade



Sage Memorial Hospital celebrates first DAISY Award winner



Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony marks a welcoming addition to patient and community care



Sage new donor wall art piece is now on display

SAGE NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF
SAGE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
SECOND QUARTER FY 2026
ISSUE NO. 8
(JANUARY TO MARCH)
PUBLISHED BY
SAGE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS
DEPARTMENT.

CHRISTIAN BIGWATER
CHIEF PATIENT EXPERIENCE OFFICER

AMMON SMITH
MARKETING SPECIALIST

LEANDER BEGAY
DIGITAL MARKETING COORDINATOR

BOARD MEMBERS

DELORES NOBLE
CHAIRWOMAN

LINDA YOVUELLA
VICE-CHAIR

VERONICA CLARK
SECRETARY/TREASURER

FRANCIS MORGAN
BOARD MEMBER

MAYBELLE KELEWOOD
BOARD MEMBER

CONTACT

P.O. BOX 457
US 191 & SR 264
GANADO, AZ 86505
+1 (928) 755-4500
INFO@SAGEMEMORIAL.COM

SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK.COM/SAGEMEMORIAL
TWITTER.COM/SAGEMEMORIAL
INSTAGRAM.COM/SAGEMEMORIAL
LINKEDIN.COM/COMPANY/SAGEMEMORIAL
TIKTOK.COM/@SAGEMEMORIAL

Meet Dixie Barlow, DHA, MPH – strengthening ties between Sage Memorial Hospital and the community



Dixie Barlow
Interim Chief
Community
Health Officer

Dixie Barlow, DHA, MPH, is a Northern Arizona native with more than 15 years of experience in healthcare, including extensive work in community and public health outreach. She earned her Master of Public Health from Grand Canyon University in 2022 and completed her Doctorate in Health Administration in 2026. Her academic and professional journey reflects a deep commitment to advancing health equity, strengthening systems of care, and mentoring the next generation of public health leaders.

Rooted in the values and traditions of the Navajo community, Dixie brings a culturally informed, community-centered approach to every aspect of her work. She is known for her collaborative leadership style, her dedication to service, and her ability to bridge public health practice with meaningful community engagement. Her work emphasizes respect, relationship-building, and honoring lived experiences as essential components of effective and sustainable health solutions.

Guided by the principles of healing with humility, learning with purpose, and advancing equity with optimism, Dixie

remains committed to creating inclusive, culturally grounded change in the communities she serves.

Dixie previously served as the Community Liaison at Sage Memorial Hospital (SMH), where she strengthened relationships between the hospital and the Navajo communities it serves through transparent communication, community engagement, and culturally respectful care. She now serves as the Interim Chief Community Health Officer, where she continues to champion community-driven approaches to health, guide strategic initiatives, and ensure that community voices remain central to SMH’s mission. Although her role has expanded, Dixie remains actively involved in the community—supporting partnerships, listening to relatives’ experiences, and ensuring that patient-centered services honor K’é and foster positive, welcoming care experiences throughout every healing journey.

Her work continues to be grounded in building meaningful connections and fostering shared responsibility for wellness. By advocating for community perspectives and collaborating closely with patients, families, and hospital teams, Dixie contributes to care experiences that are welcoming, culturally rooted, and responsive to the needs of relatives and communities.

Dr. Barlow can be reached at Sage Memorial Hospital at 928-755-4788 or by email at dixie.barlow@sagememorial.

Sage Memorial Hospital’s CEO advocate for HB 2177 to help provide funding for Navajo people’s health care

PHOENIX, Ariz. - Arizona state policy and laws have a significant impact on tribal health care delivery and systems. Specifically, Medicaid policies are important to monitor and track as many of our relatives are members of the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System and use it as a form of health insurance coverage. Attaining health care insurance ensures that services provided by our hospital are reimbursed and helps the hospital provide more care to more people. It is even more important to have health care coverage, like AHCCCS, when you must get your health care outside of SMH.

This year, SMH has been educating state lawmakers about the importance of AHCCCS to our community and system. For instance, approximately 65% of SMH’s third party revenue comes from AHCCCS. Every year the state legislature passes a budget for the AHCCCS program, and if there are any cuts to the AHCCCS benefits package, SMH and Tribes will have to identify ways to respond.

One legislative solution, in the form of HB 2177, is to amend state law that will give authority to AHCCCS to submit a Section 1115 Waiver to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). If approved by CMS, the waiver will authorize Medicaid payments for certain services provided to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) members through Indian Health Service (IHS) facilities or other facilities operated by tribes or tribal organizations that may be eliminated or reduced. Although, the State Legislature has not eliminated or reduced any AHCCCS benefits yet, HB 2177



PHOTO: Sage Memorial Hospital, CEO, Melinda White speaks to the Arizona Health & Human Services Committee.

is getting in front of the issue and putting this requirement in place.

Ms. Melinda White, CEO, Sage Memorial Hospital, testified in the House Health and Human Services Committee to advocate for the bill. She shared an important patient story of how one of our relatives was able to secure dental service, vision services, and maintain other services to treat his diabetes condition. The bill passed unanimously out of the Committee and is now in the Senate where it passed out of the assigned committees. It is awaiting a vote by the Senate.

If you would like more information on state advocacy and policy, please contact Ms. Kim Russell, Policy Advisor at (928) 755-4624.



New 3D scan technology will help Sage Memorial Hospital provide faster and more cost-effective dental prosthetics for patients

GANADO, Ariz. – Sage Memorial Hospital is proud to announce the successful upgrade of its Dental Clinic to digital impressions using cutting-edge 3D intraoral scanning technology. This transition from traditional Polyvinyl Siloxane (PVS) impression materials to the 3Shape TRIOS 3D scanner marks a significant step forward in delivering faster, more accurate, and cost-effective dental prosthetics to patients.

Located on the main campus upstairs from the Outpatient Department, the Dental Clinic at Sage Memorial Hospital serves the community with comprehensive care. The clinic operates Monday through Friday from 7:45 AM to 6:00 PM, with walk-in availability from 7:50 AM to 4:00 PM.

Under the leadership of Dental Director Dr. Kathleen Poole, the clinic collaborated with the hospital’s IT department and 3Shape representatives to install and verify the TRIOS scanner system. The new digital workflow eliminates the need for physical impressions, which previously required shipping to Dani Dental Lab in Phoenix (now Tempe area), AZ.

“Previously, for decades, dental labs utilized impressions taken with Polyvinyl Siloxane (PVS) to fabricate dental prostheses such as crowns, bridges, partial and complete dentures,” said Dr. Poole. “Labs are now moving toward digital impressions taken with a scanner that can be electronically sent to the lab and 3D printed. This produces more accurate results due to not having the PVS impression material possibly expand and shrink in the mail due to weather conditions and decreases the turnaround time of lab cases due to not having to mail cases to the lab, allowing patients to receive their dental prostheses faster.”

The upgrade initiative began in October 2024, when the clinic was still relying on analog PVS impressions. This older method occasionally resulted in ill-fitting prosthetics that required remakes, leading to treatment delays and potential impacts on patient satisfaction.

The TRIOS scanner captures precise 3D images of a patient’s mouth in seconds, enabling immediate electronic transmission to the lab. This streamlines the process, reduces material costs, saves time for both staff and Relatives (patients), and improves overall fit and quality of restorations.

To ensure a smooth transition, Assen Dobrikov, co-owner of Dani Dental Studio (formerly known as Dani Dental Lab),

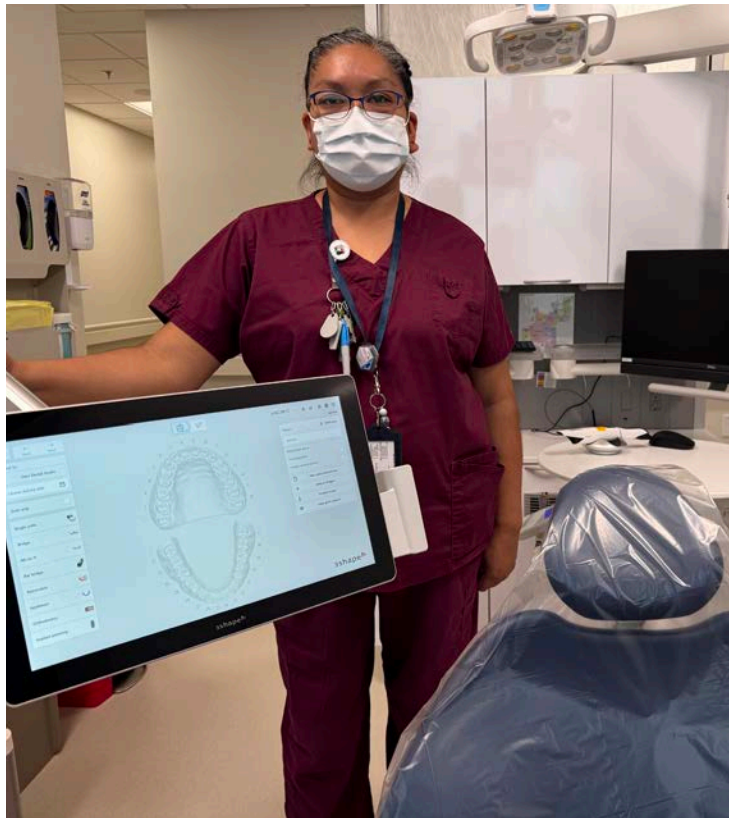


PHOTO – State-of-the-art intraoral scanner and 3D modeling now provided at Sage Memorial Hospital’s Dental

visited Sage Memorial Hospital on July 17, 2025, to provide hands-on training to the dental staff on optimal scanning techniques.

“This investment in digital technology reflects our ongoing commitment to honoring our legacy of providing high-quality, respectful care to the Diné people and surrounding communities,” said hospital leadership. “By embracing modern tools like the TRIOS 3D scanner, we are enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and patient outcomes in our Dental Clinic.”

Relatives (patients) are encouraged to visit the Dental Clinic for routine care, restorative treatments, and preventive services. For appointments or more information, contact the Sage Memorial Hospital Dental Clinic directly.



MISSION STATEMENT

THE MISSION OF SAGE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL IS TO PROVIDE QUALITY HEALTHCARE FOR THE DINÉ PEOPLE WITH RESPECT, UNITY, BEAUTY, HARMONY IN HONOR OF K’É AND THE SACREDNESS OF LIFE.

VISION STATEMENT

SAGE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL’S VISION IS TO ENHANCE THE DINÉ PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE WHILE DELIVERING INNOVATIVE HEALTHCARE.

CORE VALUES

BEE ŁÁÍ ‘DLǫ (TOGETHER/UNITY)

HODÍLZIN (SACRED)

HÓZHÓ (BEAUTY/BALANCE)

IL’Íǫ (RESPECT)

Why we call you “Relative” K’é in every care: You are our family

At Sage Memorial Hospital, you are more than a patient. You are our family.

Calling you our “relative” is a living expression of K’é — the sacred teaching that connects us all as family.

K’é reminds us to treat one another with deep respect, compassion, and unity. In Diné culture, healing has always been a shared responsibility. Family and loved ones stand together, offering prayers, support, and strength to the family member so they can be restored to balance and return to hózhó.

Here at Sage, we honor that spirit. Our doctors, nurses,

and care team join your family circle — walking beside you with the same love, respect, and dedication we give our own loved ones.

This is more than words. It is how we live our mission every day:

We provide quality healthcare for the Diné people with respect, unity, beauty, and harmony, in honor of K’é and the sacredness of life.

At Sage Memorial Hospital, you are family.



Transformative year marked by new facility opening, prestigious awards, and significant growth in patient services

GANADO, Ariz. – Sage Memorial Hospital (SMH), announced the release of its Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report. Titled “Honoring Our Legacy: Journey to Diné Excellence,” the report details a year of remarkable achievements, including the opening of a new state-of-the-art hospital, national recognition for innovative financing, and substantial growth in patient volumes.

The report highlights the completion and launch of SMH’s \$177 million, 140,296-square-foot facility in August 2024, which more than doubled capacity and introduced advanced services such as a 24/7 Emergency Department, inpatient beds, ICU, labor and delivery rooms, and expanded outpatient clinics including dental, optometry, and rehabilitative services. This expansion has enabled more community members to receive care closer to home, reducing the need for transfers to distant facilities.

“SMH has accomplished so much in the past three years, and we are entering another exciting fiscal year of growth and transformation,” said Melinda White, CEO of Sage Memorial Hospital. “This growth reflects our commitment to meeting the evolving healthcare needs of the communities we serve.”

Key accomplishments outlined in the report include:

- **Patient Volume Growth:** SMH saw strong increases across services, with Behavioral Health rising 84.8%, Inpatient Admissions up 74.1%, Emergency Room visits increasing 19.6%, Dental Clinic growing 17.4%, Rehabilitative Services up 14.0%, Optometry Clinic expanding 7.9%, Outpatient Clinics increasing 5.2%, and Respiratory Therapy rising 1.6%.
- **Awards and Recognitions:** SMH received the AzHHA Quality Award, Arizona’s Community Star designation by the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health, the Best Projects Award in Health Care from Engineering News-Record Southwest, and The Bond Buyer’s national Deal of the Year award for its innovative \$80 million tax-exempt bond issuance.
- **Community and Operational Highlights:** The year featured numerous community events, such as wellness runs, cooking classes, vaccine clinics, and youth activities. SMH achieved Joint Commission accreditation and secured a \$3 million state grant for an Outpatient Dialysis Center.
- **Financial Performance:** Cash collections reached \$44.4 million, averaging \$3.7 million per month—23% above targets. The balance sheet shows total assets of approximately \$284 million (unaudited), exhibiting sound financial footing and growth.

- **Strategic Priorities for FY2026:** Plans include launching Surgical Services, Labor & Delivery, Non-Emergent Medical Transport, Outpatient Dialysis, and Elder Care Services, alongside infrastructure projects like employee housing and wellness expansions.

“As Chair of the Board of Directors for the Navajo Health Foundation – Sage Memorial Hospital, it is with immense pride and gratitude that I reflect on Fiscal Year 2025—a truly transformative period in our hospital’s long history of service to the Diné people and surrounding communities,” said Delores Noble, Board Chair. “As we look ahead, we remain committed to expanding access to quality healthcare, honoring

K’é (kinship), and ensuring the sacredness of life for generations to come.”

The full FY2025 Annual Report is available for download at <https://sageme.me/4qsEpQ4> and provides in-depth insights into SMH’s operations, challenges, and vision for the future.



IMAGE Coverage of FY 2025 Sage Memorial Hospital annual report



Clinical Positions

Registered Nurses needed in:

- ER
- MTU
- ICU
- OB
- OR
- L&D/ OB
- PHN

Nursing Supervisors needed in:

- ICU
- PHN
- L&D/ OB

Vascular Sonographer
Mammography/DEXA Technologist
MRI Technologist
Medical Lab Technician
Nurse Educator
RN Case Manager
Dental Director
Staff Dentist
Clinical Care Coordinator
Chief Community Health Officer
Outpatient Medical Director
Clinical Informatics
Certified Pharmacy Technician
Unit Ward Clerk
Point of Care Coordinator (POCC)/ LIS Analyst
Laboratory General Supervisor

Non-Clinical Positions

Accountant
Grant Writer
Executive Assistant
Electrician
Utility Systems Repair Operator (USRO)
Plumber
General Maintenance Worker/ HVAC

BENEFITS

- Affordable Health Insurance
- 401k Retirement Plan
- Traditional Healing Reimbursement
- Short Term and Long Term Disability
- Life Insurance and Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D) Insurance
- PTO & (12) Paid Holidays (2) Floating Holidays
- Wellness Center with membership
- Child Care Services
- Onsite Housing



Volunteers are welcome to apply! Stay Safe & Thank you.

Sage Memorial Hospital gives preference to eligible and qualified applicants pursuant to the Navajo Preference in Employment Act.

www.sagememorial.com/careers

CONTACT HR DEPARTMENT:
(928) 755-4821

Sage Memorial Hospital celebrates first DAISY Award winner



PHOTO Sage Memorial Hospital proudly celebrates Deepthy John, RN, as the recipient of our first DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses.

GANADO, Ariz - Sage Memorial Hospital proudly announces Deepthy John, RN, a registered nurse in the Medical Telemetry Unit, as the hospital's first DAISY Award recipient. The award was presented during a special ceremony held on Jan. 30 in the hospital atrium.

The DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses is an international recognition program that honors nurses who demonstrate exceptional clinical skills combined with deep compassionate care. It celebrates the profound positive impact nurses have on Relatives (patients), families, and the healthcare team. Nominations come from Relatives (patients), families, and colleagues. An internal committee reviews submissions, and honorees are recognized for going above and beyond in providing extraordinary, compassionate care.

Deepthy John has been a valued member of the Sage Memorial Hospital team since 2019, bringing years of skilled and compassionate care to Relatives (patients) in the community. She received the honor based on a heartfelt nomination directly from a grateful Relative (patient).

When asked what the award means to her, Deepthy shared: "That is very valuable for me. That is from

the patient—I got the award from the patient. So I'm just thankful for the patient who took the time to nominate me. So I'm so happy, I'm so excited on this day, too."

The DAISY Award was established in 1999 by The DAISY Foundation in memory of J. Patrick Barnes, who passed away at age 33 from complications of idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP), an autoimmune disease. The foundation's mission is to honor the compassionate care nurses provide and to keep Patrick's spirit alive through recognition of outstanding nursing.

Honorees receive a formal certificate in a DAISY portfolio, a beautiful hand-carved Healer's Touch sculpture from Zimbabwe, a special DAISY Honoree pin, a copy of their nomination, and other meaningful recognitions. The nurse's unit also receives fresh cinnamon rolls to share—a tradition honoring Patrick's favorite treat during his illness—with the aroma serving as a reminder of how special nurses are.

Nominations for future DAISY Awards can be submitted through the hospital's website at www.sageme.me/DAISYaward or by using nomination forms available at Sage Memorial Hospital.

Sage Memorial Hospital leaders spotlighted traditional healing integration at Arizona Rural & Public Health Policy Forum

PHOENIX, Ariz. - Sage Memorial Hospital (SMH) Chief Executive Officer Melinda White and Policy Advisor Kim Russell presented on Feb. 17 regarding the hospital's Office of Indigenous Medicine (OIM) Program and Arizona's landmark Traditional Healing Access initiatives during the Arizona Rural & Public Health Policy Forum in Phoenix.

The General Session, titled "Traditional Healing Access Program," took place from 4:00–4:45 p.m. in the Virginia G. Piper Auditorium at the University of Arizona Phoenix campus (600 E. Van Buren Street). Their presentation highlighted how SMH blended culturally grounded Navajo healing practices with modern clinical care to improve outcomes for patients on the Navajo Nation. The presentation also shared program data and future plans—including a traditional healer mentoring program, Hogan completion, and full incorporation into patient-centered medical home (PCMH) services.

"Honoring our relatives' (patients') cultural and spiritual needs alongside clinical excellence is at the heart of the Sage Memorial Hospital experience,"

said Melinda White, CEO. "Our Office of Indigenous Medicine Program showed how traditional healing can walk hand-in-hand with modern medicine to support patients in healing—physically, emotionally, and spiritually."

Launched in 2023 under the hospital's Behavioral Health Department, the OIM Program provided Relative (patients) with access to licensed traditional practitioners for services that included ceremonial consultations, patient room cleansing, traditional mountain smoke ceremonies, blessing prayers, talking circles, storytelling, cedar burning and smudging, pregnancy rites, and cultural orientation.

The session additionally addressed Arizona's historic Medicaid reimbursement for traditional healing services, which went live on October 1, 2025, following CMS approval. Each IHS/638 facility, including SMH, collaborated with tribal communities to define reimbursable services that supported care coordination and better health outcomes for AHCCCS beneficiaries.



PHOTO Sage Memorial Hospital CEO Melinda White and Policy Advisor Kim Russell presenting on Traditional Healing Access and the Office of Indigenous Medicine Program at the Arizona Rural & Public Health Policy Forum in Phoenix.

Building health care between the New Navajo Nation medical center

by Ellis Preston, Cronkite News, March 5, 2026

PHOENIX – On the Navajo Nation, among shallow hills where neighborhoods are scarce, the grand exterior of Sage Memorial Hospital stands out.

Providing health care for thousands of Navajo people in small towns across the tribe’s land, the hospital in Ganado, Arizona, has proven itself critical to the community. However, turning it into a working medical center faced considerable obstacles.

The hospital’s about 20-acre campus encompasses inpatient and outpatient units, a behavioral health center, a traditional sweat lodge, a teepee, staff housing, an emergency room and a hogan – a ceremonial Navajo wood and mud hut currently being built outside of the main hospital.

On the campus also sits the legacy facility, a much smaller, older hospital, that used to treat fewer than half the new center’s patients. It closed in December 2024, when the new hospital facility opened.

The new medical center has twice as many outpatient rooms and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the landscape in every room. But according to Sage Memorial staff, the process it took to get there was complicated.

Constructing a medical facility on an Indigenous nation is challenging, not just due to

accessing materials and staff, but also because of the nature of communication between the tribal council and the U.S. Indian Health Services, according to Kim Russell, the policy advisor for Sage Memorial.

“We have to navigate three different systems: federal, state and tribal,” Russell said. “There is a multi-jurisdictional kind of approach that we have to take when we talk about policy. It can be complicated, but it’s necessary.”

The new hospital’s dialysis center, still under construction, exemplifies these complexities.

The demand for an outpatient kidney failure treatment was clear. Patients sought it out in the hospital’s intensive care unit for emergency inpatient dialysis, according to Kenneth Anaeme, the chief medical officer at Sage Memorial.

“We know that once we open the dialysis center we’re building, (it) is probably not enough for the needs, but that’s what we could put right now,” Anaeme said, adding that the outpatient center will be able to serve about 40 to 50 patients.

Ernasha McIntosh, a family nurse practitioner at Sage Memorial, said that right now, community members living nearby may have to travel up to 50 miles each way to get their dialysis treatment. And that doesn’t include the four- to six-hour-treatment.

Funding for the new dialysis center was diverted to install two traffic lights after the Arizona Department of Transportation required them off of the state highway near the campus.

“When they told us that we were going to be responsible for building two traffic lights, we asked what the estimated cost would be. They came in around \$1.2 million each,” said Jarom Prows, the director of facilities at Sage Memorial.

But when the hospital team sent out the bids for the traffic light construction, their only choice was a contractor costing a little over \$7 million, Prows said. “Anything new here is going to be a lot more expensive ... versus if I was going to build a hospital in Phoenix.”

Hospital staff lobbied at the state Capitol and were granted \$3 million, enough to finish building the center by the end of this October, Prows said.

“Just being in my hometown is more comforting,” said a Sage Memorial patient who asked to remain anonymous. Living only 4 miles away from the hospital, the commute still takes around 30 minutes when driving on the dirt road, but being relatively close means the patient’s family can visit often.

According to Prows, aside from the difficulties that come from building in a rural area, there is also an overall hesitancy to work with the tribal government: “A lot of companies, whenever they see that the project is going to be on Navajo, won’t even bid on it.”

The few willing to work on the reservation often mark up their prices, Prows said.

In addition to the conventional medical care, Sage Memorial is still working to incorporate



the 4 mountains: center faces hurdles

Navajo medical practices into the hospital's campus.

"The project would be a lot smoother if people fully understood the process from the beginning," Prows said. "We had a lot of people that were non-Navajo. They had good intentions. They wanted to come out here and build a big, beautiful building."

Lack of knowledge about Navajo traditions created some issues with the work of the non-Native contractors.

One of the missing features is a birthing belt. The colorful sash usually hangs from the ceiling above a patient giving birth. Patients hold onto the belt during childbirth, as part of a spiritual tradition.

Christian Bigwater, the chief patient experience officer at Sage Memorial, said that the hospital's ceiling was not built to withstand the pull from the rope.

"There's really no infrastructure in the hospital to support something like that," Bigwater said.

Several additional holistic medicinal structures, such as sweat lodges and a hogan, have been added to the campus since the new facility opened.

The original construction team did build the hospital with its entrances facing east, in accordance with Navajo custom.

"That's an important part of the culture," Bigwater said. "That's primarily to greet the morning sun."

Bigwater, who was hired after construction had already started, said there was originally no Native design within the hospital either.

"If you come into the hospital, you want that feeling or the atmosphere is part of your healing process," Bigwater said. "If we can somehow bring

that land of imagery inside the hospital we very much try to."

Bigwater put out a call for art proposals from the community, leading local tapestries and oil paintings throughout the entire facility.

"I don't necessarily want to come into a space where I don't feel like I'm at home," he said.

Just as Navajo medicine and tradition is critical in the patient areas, it's also key in the staff quarters. That's used as an incentive for medical professionals to come work in the small town of Ganado, located over 250 miles away from Phoenix.

Affordable staff housing was built along with the new facility, located directly next to the hospital.

"That's our biggest hurdle here at Sage and a lot of other health care entities here on Navajo," Prows said. "You have a lot of qualified nurses and doctors that want to come here. But even if you are Navajo, it's hard to get a house."

According to Prows, an upcoming project for Sage Memorial is to build a 31-unit apartment building and develop a tiny home community.

"We're taught to go get your education, but come home and help," Prows said. "It's really, really hard. You have people that grow up here, that love it here, that want to come home and help, but you have so many hurdles."

Many Sage Memorial staff members, including Prows and McIntosh, originally left the area and have returned.

"This is my whole purpose, is just to serve Navajo," McIntosh said.

This article first appeared on Cronkite News and is republished here under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

For more stories from Cronkite News, visit cronkitenews.azpbs.org.



PHOTO: *New staff housing.*



PHOTO: *Artwork from local artists are displayed throughout the hospital.*



Sage Memorial Hospital and 638 Association address Navajo Council Committee on tribal healthcare contracts and PRC Program

TSE BONITO, New Mexico - Executive leaders from Sage Memorial Hospital (SMH), representing the Association of Indians for Self-Determination in Healthcare (638 Association), participated in the Navajo Nation Council's Health Education and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) work session on Mar. 23.

The session focused on advancing tribal self-determination in healthcare delivery, with in-depth discussions on long-term contracts under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA, Public Law 93-638) and the

Purchased/Referred Care (PRC) program.

The meeting featured presentations from Indian Health Service (IHS) Navajo Area Office staff and representatives from Title I contracting and Title V compacting organizations. Melinda White, Chief Executive Officer of SMH, presented on behalf of the 638 Association. She highlighted how tribally managed facilities deliver essential specialty, emergency, and referred care services not always available at direct IHS sites.

A major focus of the meeting was the PRC program, which helps cover medically necessary

services when direct care is unavailable. Key topics included:

- Eligibility rules, including "He Who Refers Pays" and "Home of Record" guidelines
- Appeals processes for denied services
- Medical priorities and how tribal organizations can adapt them based on funding
- Patient education and challenges with cross-border referrals and notification timelines

Additional discussion addressed Non-Emergent Medical Transport (NEMT) regulations, including permitting processes, safety standards for drivers and vehicles, complaint resolution, and enforcement mechanisms.

The HEHSC expressed appreciation for the collaborative presentations and indicated plans to explore legislative options for standardizing contract terms, improving PRC coordination across facilities, and updating NEMT regulations. Further technical assistance sessions and stakeholder work sessions are expected in the coming months.

PHOTO - 638 leadership pose with Navajo Nation Council representatives and Indian Health Service staff during the Health Education and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) work session in Tse Bonito, New Mexico on Mar. 23.



Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony marks a welcoming addition to patient and community care

GANADO, Ariz. - Sage Memorial Hospital proudly marked the official opening of its new Gift Shop on Feb. 11, with a joyful ribbon-cutting ceremony and community celebration.

The event drew a crowd of approximately 40 attendees, including hospital staff, Relatives (patients), family members, and community supporters. Highlights included a short speech by Store Manager Elijah Morgan, who emphasized the shop's value to the community.

"This is good for the community," Morgan said. "It provides hope, a sense of care, and comfort for people who are inpatient, as well as their families and relatives. They'll be able to buy items to support the healing process."

Chief Operating Officer Tina James Tafoya joined Morgan to cut the ceremonial ribbon, symbolizing the hospital's commitment to enhancing the overall Relative (patient) and

visitor experience.

Members of the Patient Experience Team assisted by serving cake and refreshments to the enthusiastic crowd. Attendees expressed positive feedback, noting that the Gift Shop is a meaningful and welcome addition to the hospital, offering thoughtful items to brighten stays and aid recovery.

Looking ahead, Morgan shared his excitement about growing the shop's impact: "We are looking forward to ordering more items to better serve our Relatives (patients), families, and community. Elijah would also like to add a dedicated website and enable online sales, making our products more accessible to supporters near and far who wish to send gifts, comfort items, or encouragement to loved ones at Sage Memorial Hospital."

The new Gift Shop is now open and ready to welcome visitors, providing a convenient source of comfort items, gifts, and essentials in a supportive hospital environment.



PHOTO - Elijah Morgan, Gift Shop Manager, and Tina James-Tafoya, Chief Operating Officer, cutting the ribbon at the grand opening of Sage Memorial Hospital's new Gift Shop on Feb. 11.

Greasewood Clinic delivers culturally respectful care where it's needed



PHOTO - Greasewood Clinic team standing proud in front of the clinic that's been serving Navajo relatives since 1959 - Greasewood, Arizona.

GREASEWOOD, Ariz. -Sage Memorial Hospital's Greasewood Clinic, located in Greasewood, Arizona was established in 1959, and still provides healthcare for our relatives. The Greasewood Clinic is open every Thursday from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM during the spring, summer, and fall, and every Monday and Thursday from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM in the winter.

The clinic has a huge role in making healthcare more accessible in the surrounding community. "Despite geographic challenges, the clinic provides patients with comprehensive healthcare services-including dental care, as well as preventative acute and chronic medical care management," said Ernasha McIntosh, Assistant Chief Medical Officer. "Patients in the vicinity of Greasewood, Arizona often face barriers such as transportation difficulties including the presence of unpaved roads which may become impassable during certain seasons, limiting access to both acute and primary care." The Greasewood Clinic helps with the following obstacles with these strategies to ensure the community and residents of Greasewood have the ability to receive healthcare services without the trouble of long distance trips.

"The Greasewood Clinic primarily offers essential medical and dental services, which are critical to the health and well being of residents in Greasewood and surrounding

communities," said McIntosh. "These services play a key role in promoting prevention, ensuring proper management, and providing timely treatment for both acute and chronic health conditions. This is especially important for addressing the health concerns that remain prevalent among our Navajo people. It also supports long term wellness through culturally respectful and community & Relative

(patient)-

centered care." Several programs and initiatives have significantly improved community health in the service area, such as the Produce Prescription Program (P4) and the Special

Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI). "The Produce Prescription Program empowers patients to make healthier food choices by providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables as part of a treatment plan for diet related conditions such as diabetes and hypertension," said McIntosh. "Similarly, SDPI supports culturally tailored education, screenings, and lifestyle interventions, helping to reduce the risk and complications associated with diabetes-one of the

most pressing health concerns among the Navajo population."

There are always opportunities to expand services provided at Sage Memorial Hospital. "We continuously evaluate ways to grow and improve based on the evolving healthcare needs of our patient population. When considering any service expansion, we carefully assess several key factors, including the specific health needs

of our community, the feasibility of implementation, long-term sustainability, resource availability, and alignment with cultural values. Expansion is viewed not only in terms of clinical services but also in strengthening access, integrating traditional and modern practices, and enhancing care delivery

through technology, staffing, and partnerships. These efforts help ensure that future service enhancements are both meaningful and sustainable," said McIntosh. "In terms of outreach, we are committed to advancing efforts that prioritize health education, self management skills, harm reduction strategies, and community empowerment. Our future outreach will be guided by a continuous assessment of community health trends and feedback, allowing

us to tailor initiatives that are responsive and culturally appropriate. By focusing on prevention, awareness, and early intervention, we aim to support individuals in taking an active role in their own health while reducing long term disparities. Ultimately, our vision for the future is rooted in collaboration, adaptability, and a deep commitment to the health and well being of the Navajo people."

Each visit from a relative (patient) is an opportunity for Sage Memorial to serve in a meaningful way. "At Greasewood Clinic, we recognize that caring for patients is both a responsibility and a privilege," said McIntosh. Feedback plays a vital role in continuous improvement of services, guide efforts towards better care, and encouragement for the entire team. "Many patients have shared positive experiences, highlighting that our providers, nurses, medical assistants, and administrative staff are consistently friendly and helpful," said McIntosh. "They've expressed appreciation for the attentiveness of our healthcare team, noting that all their needs were addressed during their visits and that our doctors and nurse practitioners took the time to listen carefully to their concerns. Relatives (patients) have also commented on the warm, welcoming environment - saying simply, 'Our clinic is really nice!'"

"Patients in the vicinity of Greasewood, Arizona often face barriers such as transportation difficulties..."

Sage Memorial Hospital hosts successful skirt making workshop celebrating culture, creativity, and community

GANADO, Ariz. – Sage Memorial Hospital, operated by the Navajo Health Foundation, is proud to celebrate the recent success of its beginner-friendly Skirt Making Workshop, held on Saturday, Feb. 28. The event, led by Calandra Etsitty, owner of Winston Paul, provided participants with hands-on skills to craft their own skirts, fostering creativity, cultural connection, and personal empowerment in the community.

The full-day workshop, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the hospital's Behavioral Health Building (next to the Presbyterian Church), welcomed individuals aged 13 and older. With a limited capacity of 20 participants, the session offered a supportive and personalized learning environment focused on essential sewing techniques for creating handmade

clothing.

One participant, Bionca Cleveland, shared her heartfelt gratitude on social media: "Ahxé'héé Calandra @winstonpaul.co, Candace @cxffeeghoul & Sage Memorial Hospital for making my dream a reality. I've always wanted to learn how to make skirts for myself, my children, and relatives and now I can confidently say I can help with that... I am beyond grateful."

Sage Memorial Hospital regularly organizes community events and workshops as part of its commitment to holistic wellness, cultural preservation, and community engagement on the Navajo Nation. This skirt-making class aligned with those values by blending practical skill-building with opportunities for creative expression and intergenerational sharing.



PHOTO - Participants proudly display their handmade skirts during Sage Memorial Hospital's beginner-friendly Skirt Making Workshop held on Feb. 28, in Ganado, Arizona.

"We are thrilled to partner with talented community leaders like Calandra Etsitty to offer programs that inspire self-sufficiency and joy," said a representative from Sage Memorial Hospital. "Events like this strengthen our community bonds and support the well-being of Diné people and all who join us."

Sage Memorial Hospital extends sincere thanks to Calandra Etsitty and Winston Paul for their expertise

and dedication, as well as to all participants who brought enthusiasm and creativity to the workshop.

For more information about upcoming community events, workshops, or health services at Sage Memorial Hospital, please contact cope.grant@sagememorial.com or visit sagememorial.com. Follow @SageMemorial on X for the latest updates.

Sage Memorial Hospital welcomes St. Michael's High School students for inspiring healthcare career exploration visit

GANADO, Ariz. – On Mar. 6, approximately 25 students from St. Michael's High School (part of St. Michael Indian School on the Navajo Nation) visited Sage Memorial Hospital for a special two-hour career exploration program designed to spark interest in healthcare professions.

The students, representing all four grade levels and participating through the school's pre-medical interest group, received early exposure to real-world healthcare roles. The visit was sponsored by the Frontline Indigenous Partnership (FLIP), a program aimed at improving the health of Indigenous communities by empowering healthcare providers and creating youth career pathway programs. FLIP is organized and coordinated by Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, and is overseen by Dr. Valerie Dobiesz.

Upon arrival, the students were warmly greeted by Jocelyn Lewis of the Medical Staff Office and Patient

Ambassador Sheilandria Kaye. They then received welcoming remarks from Sage Memorial Hospital's senior leadership: Tina James-Tafoya, Chief Operation Officer, Ronnye Etcitty, Chief Human Resources Officer, Yolanda Burke, Interim Chief Nursing Officer, and Dr. Schlabach, one of the hospital's senior clinicians, provided an engaging introduction to the practice of medicine in a rural setting. Students then toured key departments and met directly with dedicated professionals: Laboratory – Hosted by Jennifer Cly and her team, Radiology – Hosted by Robin Miller, Emergency Department – Hosted by Robert Long, who demonstrated emergency airway procedures.

"This is a unique opportunity to inspire the next generation of healthcare professionals right here in our community," said Shawn M. D'Andrea, MD, Emergency Physician at Sage Memorial Hospital. "We are deeply grateful to Dr. Valerie Dobiesz and the Frontline Indigenous Partnership for connecting us with



PHOTO Tina James-Tafoya, Chief Operation Officer at Sage Memorial Hospital, welcoming and addressing St. Michael's High School students during their healthcare career exploration visit.

PHOTO Dr. John Schlabach, Family Practice Physician at Sage Memorial Hospital's Outpatient Clinic, engaging with students and demonstrating aspects of rural medicine during the career exploration program.

these outstanding students."

For more information about the Frontline Indigenous Partnership, visit www.the-flip.org.



Sage Memorial's new donor wall art piece is now on display

GANADO, Ariz. - We're excited to reveal our beautiful new donor wall at Sage Memorial Hospital - an artistic tribute honoring our generous donors who helped build our legacy through philanthropy. Learn more about our program at sagememorial.com/philanthropy.

Join our #SageExperience contest for Patient Experience Week happening April 27-May 1!

Here's how to enter:

- Take a selfie or short video in front of the new donor wall
- Share why giving inspires you
- Post it on Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, or TikTok
- Tag or mention @SageMemorial
- Use the hashtag #SageExperience

Two lucky winners will each receive a \$50 gift card!

Entry deadline: Now through May 1, 2026

Drawing: Held on May 4, 2026

Winners announced: May 6, 2026 via social media

We will use a random selector generator to choose the winners. No purchase necessary.



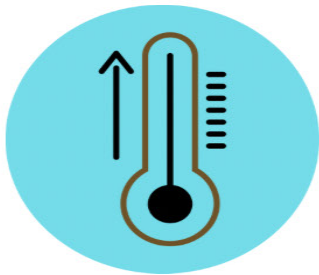
Chickenpox (Varicella) ALERT:



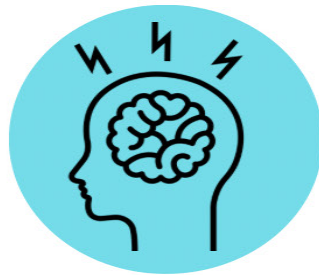
Sage Memorial Hospital
NAVAJO HEALTH FOUNDATION

Help keep our relatives safe:
Keep vaccinations up to date &
Stay home if you are sick.

Symptoms: Contagious 1-2 days before rash appears and until blisters have crusted over.



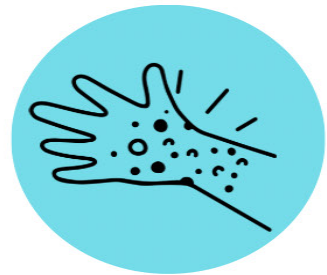
High Fever



Headache



Fatigue/Loss of
Appetite



Itchy Rash that
Blister

Risk Groups:

Newborns, pregnant people, & those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for severe illness.

Prevention:

1

Call ahead before seeking medical care.

3

Do Not enter the Hospital or Clinics.

2

Cover any rash if possible.

4

Follow instructions from healthcare staff.

**Call our
Hotline:**

(928) 607-0139