The Challenge: Menominee County, made up of the Menominee Reservation, is the poorest Wisconsin county and consistently ranks last in Wisconsin’s County Health Rankings. Menominee people suffer from high rates of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and rising cancer rates that may be due to rapidly increasing rates of obesity. There is significant need to implement sustainable changes in family health behaviors to decrease obesity and chronic disease, thereby improving the health of future generations.

Project Goal: To address these and other challenges, the Menominee community created the Community Engagement Workgroup (CEW), a dedicated group within the tribe consisting of many sectors: academia, community, tribal clinic staff, school district staff, youth-serving organizations, human services, food distribution and more. The Wisconsin Partnership Program funded the CEW to implement policy, systems and environmental changes and develop a comprehensive data management and evaluation plan for childhood obesity and health monitoring. The committee worked to identify shared goals, align activities, resources and evaluation measures, and create 90-day work plans to address actionable and achievable aims.

Results: Many new tribal members and organizations joined the CEW and all tribal agencies sent representatives. The CEW achieved significant policy, systems and environmental changes related to obesity that include:

Policy changes:
• Strengthened school nutrition policies and meal programs
• Implemented a tribal wellness policy to support employee physical activity during the workday
• Lengthened recreation center hours

Systems changes:
• Built a new grocery store on the reservation
• Provided students with healthy foods for the weekend through the school-based Smart Sacks program
• Developed gardening programs and school and community gardens

Environmental changes:
• Refinished the track and opened it to the community
• Developed new sidewalks in the primary research community
• Developed school and community gardens

The project also developed a data management and long-term evaluation plan for childhood obesity and health monitoring. The CEW’s work continues via funding from other grants to the Menominee Nation. In addition, Menominee is one of the two pilot communities in the Wisconsin Partnership Program’s Obesity Prevention Initiative (OPI).