Cherokee Nation Gets $1.5M Grant to Address Rising Hepatitis C Rates

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The Cherokee Nation is receiving a one-year, $1.5 million grant from the U.S. government to fund a new study on identification and treatment of hepatitis C virus (HCV) among Native Americans, Tulsa World reports.

Under the new project, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Oklahoma Department of Health and the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center will partner with tribal health authorities to help address high rates of hep C among residents in northeastern Oklahoma. Since January 2014, Cherokee Nation clinics have reported treating 274 cases of hepatitis C, but it's estimated that between 4,000 and 5,000 cases exist within its service area alone.

Along with paying for additional staff to help amp up testing and address rising hep C case loads, the grant's funding will also go toward epidemiology and surveillance work to explore any possible links between hepatitis C and tribal tattooing.

Cherokee Nation Health Services says more than 60 percent of those testing positive for hep C in their clinics so far have been between ages 50 and 69. The grant will expand screening for patients as young as 20 in the region.

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