

Reno Sparks Tribal Health Center: Better RCM Benefits the Community

Reno Sparks Tribal Health Center in northwest Nevada provides patients from Native American tribes with medical, dental, ophthalmic, and behavioral care, and other services. Patients without insurance are not charged.

Amy Blackstone is the business office manager at Reno Sparks. When she first entered her new workplace, she was impressed by the beauty of the building. Water drips through a large sculpture resembling a woven basket that hangs from a high ceiling, runs through a pebble channel inlaid in the floor, and passes a multi-story curved glass wall with a view of the Truckee River.

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CLIENT PROFILE

Reno Sparks Tribal Health Center

Ownership: Tribally owned and operated clinic

Location: Reno-Sparks Indian Colony in northwest Nevada

Mission: Raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level

Services: Adult medicine, pediatrics, mental health services, basic laboratory services, comprehensive dental care, substance abuse services, pharmacy, eye care, nutrition, diabetes care, acupuncture, home visitation, injury prevention services, podiatry, and physical therapy

NEXTGEN HEALTHCARE SOLUTION

- NextGen® RCM Services

HIGHLIGHTS



40 days to 8 days
Decline in claims creation lag



180+ days to between 60 and 90 days
Reduction in time it took for claims to be paid



\$3.8 million to below \$2 million
Decline in outstanding A/R

63%

34% to 63%
Increase in GCR for adjudicated claims

Care for friends and family

The population served by the clinic has high rates of kidney failure, diabetes, and heart disease. Behavioral health concerns are common as well. Many patients treated by the dental clinic are malnourished because they have no teeth. Blackstone estimates that the practice serves about 40 percent pediatric patients. The remaining adult population is high risk—the effects of historical trauma and poverty.

Blackstone describes the clinic as a place where “friends and family care for friends and family.” Most employees and patients are members or descendants of the Paiute, Shoshone, and Washoe nations, who make up the Reno Sparks Indian Colony (the clinic serves Native Americans from Alaska and other states as well). Multiple generations work at the clinic; for example, one employee works with two of her children and one of her grandchildren.

“We want to see family members and close friends taken care of,” says Blackstone. “But we also want to see the clinic grow and flourish. The more we flourish, the greater the number of services we can offer.”

THE CHALLENGE

According to Blackstone, when she began working at the clinic in March 2019, financial management was a challenge.

“We weren’t following best practices. We were adjusting and voiding charges like crazy. It was kind of a free for all. Claims were not sent out in a timely manner,” recalls Blackstone.

“Communication was poor in the business office and even worse between the business office and other parts of the clinic. If you would ask one person a question and then go to the next person and ask the same question, you never got the same answer.”

Blackstone recalls an especially difficult meeting with the practice’s economic development committee. For almost two hours, they grilled her—why does your staff have jobs; what are they doing; and why is money not being collected?

“It was a really bad situation,” says Blackstone. “I knew that we needed to make a change.”

THE SOLUTION

Several months after she started her position, Blackstone began considering NextGen Revenue Cycle Management (RCM) Services. Implementation took place in May 2020. The change, according to Blackstone, has been remarkable.

“Now it’s not a free-for-all. We’re actually organized. We have a path. We follow our process every day. And if, by chance, I don’t come in tomorrow, somebody else can come in, work the same process, and get the same things done.”

THE RESULTS

“It’s wonderful what NextGen RCM Services has done for us,” says Blackstone. “During the COVID-19 pandemic, we made only \$500,000 less than the equivalent period the year before. If we hadn’t had RCM, we would have made nothing. We would be sinking now.”

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Business Office Manager
Reno Sparks Tribal Health Center

Better work relationships

Blackstone attributes much of this success to her relationship with her client manager from NextGen RCM Services.

“I really lean a lot on our client manager,” explains Blackstone. “We really hit it off. We’re goofy in the same way and we’re serious in the same way.

“If ask her about best practices, she’ll lead me down the right path. She’s taught me so much. I pass what I learn from her on to my colleagues. It actually helped improve our relationship as co-workers.”

Increased automation

One essential change: increased automation for processing payments. Before working with NextGen RCM Services, the business office only received paper payments. That meant the practice relied on a staff member posting each check—not uncommonly, checks sat on a desk for weeks.

“Now we have 80 to 90 percent of our payers on electronic funds transfer (EFT) and electronic remittance advice (ERA),” says Blackstone. She describes the switch to automation as nothing short of wonderful.

Better financial performance

Blackstone shares some metrics to show how financial performance has improved:

- **Claims creation lag** went from almost 40 days to 8 days
- **Average time for claims to be paid** went from 180+ days to between 60 and 90 days
- **Outstanding accounts receivable (A/R)** went from \$3.8 million to below \$2 million (and continues to decline)
- **Gross collection rate (GCR)** for adjudicated claims went from 34% to 63% in 12 months

From anxiety to success

“I won’t even lie, it was scary,” says Blackstone, describing her anxiety when she took a first look at Reno Sparks Tribal Health Center’s financial data. “It was not what I was expecting at all. It made me sad—to see we were going to fail. That is truly the way I saw it. If we kept up at that rate, we wouldn’t have a clinic in two years.

“Now, two years later, what is the difference NextGen RCM Services made in our clinic? We can say now, ‘we are successful. It will get better. We will be able to provide better services to our patients.’”

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No other choice

Amy Blackstone talks about the significance of her work: “If we did not have RCM and were not successful, we would have to start cutting services. We have a demographic of uninsured and under-insured patients. These patients would have to go outside of tribal for services.

“In the outside community—the doctors’ offices where you and I would go to—a consultation with a specialist may cost \$400 dollars. Labs can cost thousands of dollars. Because some of the poorest people in the community rely on us, we have to be successful in managing our finances.

“Indigenous patients have very little. They rely on the tribe for their money, food, electricity, garbage pickup, and more. To have the clinic taken away and not have insurance or anywhere to go for care, would be very detrimental to the community.

“And not just the Native American community, because if the Native American community disappears, there would be a great deficit in the entire Reno Sparks area. Other services and businesses in the community are interconnected with this population. And surrounding communities rely on us to keep clinic doors open.

“Not having the business office, not bringing that money, and not having the backing of NextGen RCM Services would shut down most of northern Nevada, especially for Native Americans.”



HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

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