



# The New Mexico Tribal-State Judicial Consortium

*STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS, FOSTERING  
COMMUNICATIONS*

November 12, 2015

TO: All Pueblo Governors

FROM: Tribal-State Judicial Consortium Drug Court Committee

RE: **Support of Tribal to Healing Wellness Courts**

As part of the Tribal-State Judicial Consortium Drug Court Committee, we want to show our support of Tribal to Healing Wellness Courts in New Mexico.

Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts are comparable to state drug courts. The drug court movement began in the late 1980s in response to the growing number of drug-related court criminal cases and the resulting overcrowding of jails and prisons. For many it became clear that the standard law enforcement and corrections policies did not have the impact on reducing drug abuse that the proponents of the “War on Drugs” had hoped. The judicial practice of sentencing offenders who were addicted to drugs to jail or prison followed by standard probation typically did not address offenders’ addiction issues. This resulted in the justice system becoming a “revolving door” of substance abusers coming through courts and in and out of jail.

Consequently, the drug court approach was developed to both hold criminals accountable for their crimes, and to address the addiction of substance abusers. This approach departed from the then-standard court practice by systematically bringing treatment services to a target population: people charged with alcohol and drug-related offenses in the criminal, civil, family, and juvenile courts. The drug court approach anchors treatment with the authority of a judge and/or drug court team that holds the participant personally and publicly accountable for treatment participation and progress.

Following implementation state drug courts soon gained national attention through their success stories of addicts getting clean and becoming better community members. Many American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) tribal leaders and judges took note and expressed interest in its potential benefits to their communities. They were particularly interested in how it could help address the severe alcoholism and its associated crime prevalent in Indian country, especially in a non-adversarial process. Tribal and federal advocates realized that if the drug court concept was modified to meet the specific needs of Native nations, it could positively affect tribal communities.