

## **School nurse from Red Lake School District named Minnesota Immunization Champion**

Charmaine Branchaud, school nurse for the Red Lake School District, has been named a 2023 Immunization Champion by the Association of Immunization Managers (AIM) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). Branchaud was recognized for her extensive career promoting immunization and her recent outstanding efforts that increased the overall immunization rate from 84% to 94% for students in kindergarten, first grade and second grade in the Red Lake School District.

Branchaud displayed passion and diligence throughout the labor-intensive school immunization project. She reviewed hundreds of student immunization records, collaborated with partners to organize a school-based immunization clinic event and communicated with families of students not up to date on their immunizations. Branchaud plans to keep working to get all students in the district fully immunized.

A member of the Red Lake Chippewa Indians, Branchaud has been a registered nurse for 46 years, always amplifying the importance of vaccines for her patients. Her great grandmother was a medicine woman who was passionate about healing others and inspired Branchaud to become a nurse. After working for many health organizations — including the Indian Health Board of Minneapolis, Park Nicollet Center and Indian Health Services — she sought and obtained licensure as a school nurse and began working for the Red Lake School District in 2021.

From September 2022 to June 2023, Branchaud served as a member of the Minnesota Department of Health’s Childhood Immunization Workgroup, a group of exemplary leaders from several sectors tasked with addressing existing gaps in immunization rates. Her experience working with families in Red Lake provided valuable insights to the workgroup.

“Charmaine Branchaud is a great example of an immunization champion, and she is very deserving of this award,” said Jessica Hancock-Allen, director of the Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division at MDH.

“She truly loves being a nurse,” added Hannah Tolman, the public health nurse who nominated Branchaud for the award, “and her dedication to immunizing the children in the Red Lake School District will have a positive impact on the health of the community for generations.”

[Immunization Champion Awards](#) are announced annually during [National Immunization Awareness Month](#) in August, highlighting the importance of routine immunization for people of all ages, including children who may need immunizations before school starts. Hancock-Allen noted that many children fell behind on recommended immunizations during the pandemic, so now is a great time for parents to connect with their child’s health care provider to make sure they are up to date.

The Immunization Champion awards acknowledge the outstanding efforts of people who go above and beyond to ensure immunization access in their communities. Champions are selected from a pool of health professionals, coalition members, community advocates and other immunization leaders in all 50 U.S. states, eight U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.