Understanding American Indian Tobacco Use

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Tobacco is Medicine

"When it is used correctly, it has the power to bring good things and, like other medicines, if it is not used correctly, it has the power to bring great harm." Anishinaabe Elder
Commercial vs. Traditional

• Commercial tobacco is tobacco you buy in the store.
  - Loose tobacco
  - Cigarettes & chewing tobacco
  - Vape, other manufactured products
• Traditional tobacco is usually not bought in the store.
  - Indian tobacco
  - Mixture that may not contain any tobacco

Our Story

The American Indian Cancer Foundation (AICAR) was established to address tremendous cancer inequities faced by American Indian and Alaska Native communities.
Our Vision

Our vision is a world where American Indians and Alaska Natives are once again the healthiest people on this planet and are not dying from preventable causes of cancer.

Our Approach

We believe...
Native communities have the wisdom to find the solutions to health inequities, but are often seeking the organizational capacity, expert input and resources to do so.

AIAN Cancer Data

American Indians and Alaska Natives face alarming inequities in both cancer incidence and mortality.

Cancer death rates for AIAN increased over a 20 year span, while decreasing for Whites over the same time frame.

The U.S. has celebrated decreasing cancer death rates in the past 20 years, but AIAN cancer mortality rates are still on the rise.
Regional Differences

Distinct patterns in AI/AN cancer rates are observed across six geographic regions defined by the Indian Health Service.

MN Adult Cigarette Smoking Rates

American Indians

All Minnesota

Never
Former
Current
Complex Issues

- Lack of religious freedom until 1978
- Cultural norms ➔ commercial tobacco use in cultural practices and ceremonies
- Historical trauma ➔ current issues and trauma
- Boarding schools ➔ loss of culture
- Tribal economic issues ➔ sales and casinos
- Cultural identity ➔ imagery on tobacco products
- Social norms ➔ more people smoke than don’t

United States American Indian Religious Freedom Act

1978
Clinic Systems

IQiQs Programs: Resources and technical assistance to support QI efforts across tribal health systems to increase quit rates:
- Educational training
- Customized tools
- Engage interdepartmental team to set QI goals and implement systems changes
- EMR data monitoring
- Encourages the 5 A's model

Want to quit?
Let’s talk.

Of the current American Indian Smokers in Minnesota...
Nearly 2/3 want to Quit Smoking but don’t know where to start...

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Changing the Story: Health Equity

Health is a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being, not just the absence of disease or infirmity.

Health Equity is when all people have the opportunity to realize their health potential—the highest level of health possible for that person without limits imposed by structural inequalities.

The 40%

PSE Approach for Change

- A framework for creating positive, sustainable change
- We can relate the concept to our indigenous worldviews
  - Philosophy: Guiding principles for ways of living
  - Systems: Family, clan, and food systems
  - Environmental: Seasonal practices for harvesting foods, medicines and taking care of the earth and all of its inhabitants
Why the World Will Never Be Tobacco-Free: Reframing “Tobacco Control” Into a Traditional Tobacco Movement

Cindy Jianhua, Carol Semmaki, Chena Hopf, Kathleen Stanley-Paxton, Linda Zeller-Dent, Nicole Terez Etikan, and David Sorensen

As governments around the world move to reduce commercial tobacco use, an alarming disparity has taken shape in Minnesota. Recent studies revealed that adult smoking rates in American Indian (AI) reservations are double those of nonreservation AI communities, the implications of which are stark. This disparity is not unique to Minnesota but is evident across the country. The disparities in smoking rates have led to discussions about effective strategies to reduce tobacco use among AI communities. In response, a collaborative effort was launched to develop culturally relevant tobacco control programs. This initiative, known as the “Cultural Tobacco Control Project,” aims to empower AI communities to develop and implement programs that align with their cultural values and traditions. The project involves partnerships with local tribes, community organizations, and health care providers to create culturally appropriate tobacco control strategies. Through this collaborative approach, the project seeks to reduce tobacco use among AI communities and promote healthier lifestyles. The project utilizes a variety of strategies, including community-based tobacco cessation programs, culturally relevant education, and capacity building to support tobacco control efforts. By focusing on community-led solutions, the project aims to address the root causes of tobacco use and promote long-term change. Through this culturally informed approach, the project seeks to create a sustainable impact and foster a healthier future for AI communities. This initiative highlights the importance of tailoring tobacco control programs to meet the unique needs of AI communities and underscores the potential for cultural competence to drive meaningful change. The project’s success will rely on strong partnerships, community engagement, and a commitment to cultural responsiveness. As tobacco control efforts continue to evolve, it is critical to recognize the unique needs of AI communities and develop strategies that are both culturally relevant and effective in reducing tobacco use. By prioritizing community-driven solutions, the project aligns with broader advocacy efforts to address health disparities and promote health equity among AI communities. The project’s focus on cultural competence demonstrates the potential for meaningful change and sets a precedent for future tobacco control efforts.
Keep in Touch with Us!

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