



## Clinical Technical Assistance: National Native American Heritage Month

November is National Native American Heritage Month (NNAHM). It is a time to celebrate the important contributions of Native people and celebrate their diverse traditions, culture, and histories – this is a time to raise awareness through community events, online resources and education, and shared experiences.

### History:

In 1986, Congress passed a Joint Resolution that proclaimed the week of November 23–30th “American Indian Week” and four years later, in 1990, November was proclaimed “National American Indian Heritage Month.”

### Key Facts:

- Native nations were separated from their homelands due to battles, genocide, and western expansion. There are distinctions among various tribes resulting from geographic location, language, and cultural practices.
- “American Indians have been through multiple traumas over the last 500 years, including loss of land and culture. They’ve had to abstain from wearing their traditional clothing, eating their traditional foods, and speaking their established languages.”<sup>1</sup>
- American Indians were not given citizenship until 1924.
- More than 50% of U.S. state names are based on Native American words.
- There are approximately 150 different Native American languages in the United States and Canada.
- Today there are approximately 2 million Native Americans living in the United States and approximately 1 million living in Canada.

### Substance Use and Mental Health – Prevalence, Social Determinants and Barriers:

- Native Americans have higher rates of substance use and depression in comparison to other races.<sup>1</sup>
- Native Americans have the highest rate of poverty in the U.S. in comparison to other races.<sup>1</sup>
- On average, less than 50% of Native Americans finish high school – education is one of the determinants of the quality of one’s mental and physical health.<sup>1</sup>

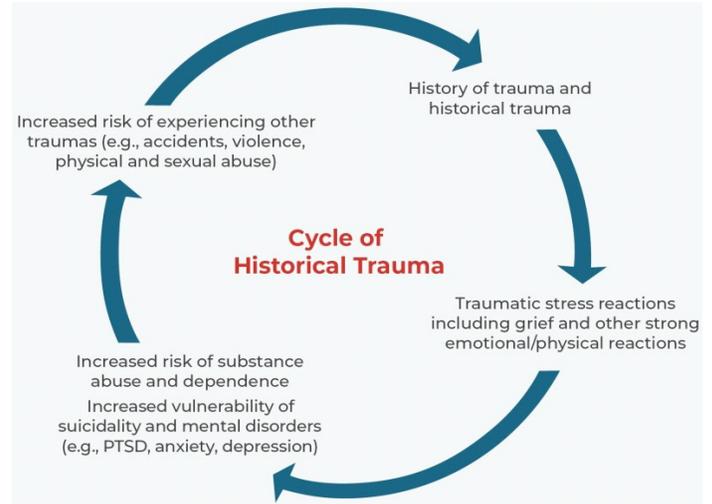
**Among American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) aged 18 years and older with a substance use disorder, 1 in 11 struggled with illicit drugs and alcohol in 2018.<sup>2</sup>**

- Native Americans have higher rates of substance use and depression in comparison to other races.<sup>1</sup>
- There was a significant increase in major depressive episodes in American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) aged 18-25 between 2015 and 2018.<sup>2</sup>



## Treatment Consideration

- **Be attentive** – Monitor for any potential suicidal ideation or behavior as suicidal behaviors are a significant problem in many Native American communities, particularly among young men (ages 15-24).<sup>3</sup>
- **Provide multidisciplinary care** – Native Americans experience some mental health disorders, such as anxiety, at a higher frequency than other Americans.<sup>3</sup>
- **Integrate cultural supports** – Traditional healers may be a key component of a client’s support or care system. It is essential that service providers respect the role of traditional healers and integrate the approach into the overall service plan for the client.
- **Assess for trauma** – Experiencing at least one traumatic event is common for many Native Americans.<sup>3</sup> If on-site trauma services are not available, facilitate a referral to a trauma-trained professional.
- **Recognize the likely presence of historical trauma** – Historical trauma can be defined as the impact of emotional and psychological trauma across generations.



### Additional Resources:

SAMHSA American Indian and Alaska Native Culture Card - [https://store.samhsa.gov/product/American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Culture-Card/sma08-4354?referer=from\\_search\\_result](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Culture-Card/sma08-4354?referer=from_search_result)

SAMHSA TIP 61: Behavioral Health Services for American Indians and Alaska Natives - [https://store.samhsa.gov/product/TIP-61-Behavioral-Health-Services-For-American-Indians-and-Alaska-Natives/SMA18-5070?referer=from\\_search\\_result](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/TIP-61-Behavioral-Health-Services-For-American-Indians-and-Alaska-Natives/SMA18-5070?referer=from_search_result)

SAMHSA Understanding Historical Trauma When Responding to an Event in Indian Country - [https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Understanding-Historical-Trauma-When-Responding-to-an-Event-in-Indian-Country/SMA14-4866?referer=from\\_search\\_result](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Understanding-Historical-Trauma-When-Responding-to-an-Event-in-Indian-Country/SMA14-4866?referer=from_search_result)

### Sources:

1. Source: “People of Color Face Significant Barriers to Mental Health Services,” CNN article published October 10, 2020. Contributor: Jacque Gray, Research Associate Professor at University of North Dakota’s Department of Population Health and Associate Director of the Center for Rural Health for Indigenous Programs.
2. Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: American Indians and Alaska Natives.
3. Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, TIP 61: Behavioral Health Services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. 2019.
4. Image Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, TIP 61: Behavioral Health Services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. 2019.