

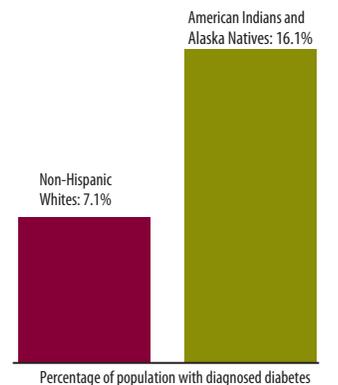
# NATIONAL PROGRAM TO ELIMINATE DIABETES-RELATED DISPARITIES IN VULNERABLE POPULATIONS: 2010–2015

## COMMUNITIES IN ACTION: Association of American Indian Physicians



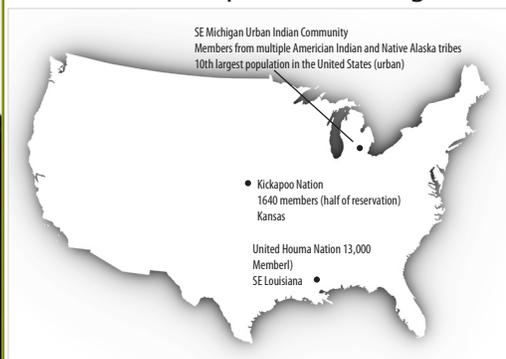
### Who is working to address reduce diabetes in Tribal communities?

The Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP) has a long history of working to reduce health disparities in American Indian and Alaska Native populations. As one of the National Programs to Eliminate Diabetes-Related Disparities in Vulnerable Populations grantees, this project focuses on reducing the complications of diabetes among American Indian adults in three communities: the Southeast Michigan Urban Indian Community, the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, and the United Houma Nation in Louisiana. The AAIP Vulnerable Populations program seeks to mobilize American Indian communities to develop policy, systems, and environmental strategies to eliminate diabetes disparities.



### Why is AAIP working to reduce diabetes in Tribal communities?

Diabetes is an epidemic among the American Indian population. People of American Indian or Alaska Native background are the most likely of all US racial and ethnic groups to have diabetes (see figure, CDC, 2011). The three Tribal communities profiled here provide examples of how widely conditions can vary between Native communities, yet all of the communities face challenges in getting access to health care services.



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The **United Houma Nation (UHN)** is a state-recognized tribe spread across a primarily 6-parish area spanning approximately 4,570 square miles in southeast Louisiana. Currently the American Indian population accounts for approximately 30,000 (0.7%) people in Louisiana. In 2010, approximately 2,500 American Indians had been diagnosed with diabetes in Louisiana.

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The **Southeast Michigan Urban Indian Community (SMUIC)**, located in urban Wayne County, Michigan, is home to the 10th largest population of American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States. The total population for the state of Michigan is approximately 9.8 million people and the American Indian population accounts for 62,000 people. Southeast Michigan has an estimated diabetes prevalence of 16%.

Half of the **Kickapoo Tribe's** 1,640 enrolled tribal members live on or near a 30-square-mile federal Indian reservation in Brown County, Kansas. The percentage of the population who are American Indian in Brown County is 9.3% and 1.0% in Kansas overall. Approximately, 9.6% of adults aged 18 years or older in Brown County have diabetes.

## How is AAIP working to address diabetes in Tribal communities? Community Mobilization to Action

AAIP identified the three community sites among its previously established diabetes partnership network. These communities, which are similar in their large concentration of people with American Indian heritage, had all previously participated in training on how to develop a community coalition. However, they live in different settings—UHN in a rural area, SMUIC in an urban area, and much of the Kickapoo tribe is on a reservation.

AAIP learned that an important first step toward mobilizing these communities was to obtain buy-in about the process for engagement. AAIP achieved this objective through these steps:

- AAIP staff contacted key people in each community.
- Through the identified key people, other community leaders were recruited to be partners in a problem solving process as part of a community coalition.
- Once established, each coalition developed a plan to address the community's specific health care needs.
- Each coalition was awarded a mini-grant to help carry out the activities in the strategic plan.

## Sharing Resources and Building Skills to Address Health Challenges

AAIP hosted sessions to train representatives from each of the three tribal communities on how to do the following:

- Conduct a community needs assessment.
- Understand the results of the needs assessment.
- Use needs assessment data to set goals.
- Develop a strategic plan.



## Community Interventions

The following are some of the interventions included in the strategic plans and carried out by the three communities.

### Physical Activity

- The **Kickapoo** tribe developed a community walking trail, the first of its kind on a reservation. To maximize access and use, the walking trail was located in a much-used area of the reservation—near tribal offices, senior centers, and the diabetes office. A recently-adopted policy allows tribal employees to get paid if they use the trail during the day.
- Because the **UHN** tribal areas are located in the bayous of Louisiana, land space is limited. To increase physical activity among its members, the coalition converted a room in a local community center into an exercise room. The coalition purchased exercise equipment with funds from an AAIP mini-grant.

### Healthy Eating

- In partnership with AARP (formerly known as American Association of Retired Persons), the **Kickapoo** and three other tribes in Kansas initiated efforts to increase healthy eating among their members. One successful approach was a cooking class, with a focus on traditional ways to prepare healthy foods.
- The first class had nearly 30 participants and many were from four local tribes. Because of the success of the classes, AARP has agreed to continue funding the classes annually.
- The **SMUIC** coalition worked with the local food bank to implement the Fresh Food Share Program, this is a program where community members can receive free boxes of fresh produce at distribution sites located within the tribal community. Since the program began in 2013, participation has increased among those ordering more than one box (75%) and those ordering monthly food boxes (50%).



## AAIP's lessons learned for implementing diabetes programs for Tribal communities:

- Having the tribal communities take part in assessing needs and planning interventions is essential for them to take ownership of the process to make changes.
- Tribal members may have difficulty trusting groups from outside of the tribe; therefore, outside groups must respect tribal traditions and work around existing events and activities occurring in the community.
- It is important to know the context and history of relationships in the community before beginning—take the time to become aware of community dynamics.
- Tribal Council elections may have a substantial effect on coalition work. Expect and plan for potential leadership shifts.
- Integrating the desired healthy behaviors into traditional ways of eating and living can ensure that tribal historical context is acknowledged and valued.

**To learn more about the Association of American Indian Physicians and the Vulnerable Populations program, please contact:**

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