

Building *Rx Awareness* Among American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Audiences

A COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

Introduction

As part of the *Rx Awareness* campaign, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed communication materials for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) audiences. These products were developed in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and based on their insights, perspectives, and real-world experiences. This toolkit supplement is a road map for developing and implementing AI/AN prescription opioid misuse and overdose prevention campaigns in AI/AN communities.

The AI/AN participants featured in the *Rx Awareness* campaign share stories and experiences that show common themes and reflect many shared values across their communities. It is highly encouraged that you engage with local tribal populations to learn how campaign products may address their specific needs.



Historical, cultural, social, and economic background

While addressing the opioid overdose epidemic is a nationwide priority, AI/AN audiences represent underserved populations experiencing a greater risk of overdose death.¹

Indigenous peoples in the United States are diverse, with unique cultural beliefs, practices, and social structures. The communities they come from and presently reside in are diverse in terms of geography, organization, population density, economic status, and other characteristics. Many Alaska Native communities have only somewhat recently moved from a subsistence economy, where they rely on the customary and traditional use of resources for food, clothing, etc., for their families, to a cash-based economy, which has greatly influenced the structure of these communities.² Furthermore, American Indians have suffered from oppression associated with the reservation system and intergenerational poverty.³

It is impossible to understand and message to AI/AN audiences without first gaining an understanding of their histories, including key events that shaped who they are today.

Colonization, oppression, and forced removal and relocation of many AI/AN people occurred fewer than one or two generations ago.³ These harmful past experiences are not distant memories and contribute to unresolved intergenerational grief experienced today by Indigenous populations across the country. Colonization and its resulting traumas, combined with policy, socio-economic barriers, and other social and health disparities, have fueled the abundance of substance use disorders in Indian Country and Alaska.

Following the Native American Self Determination movement of the 1960s, a shift towards independence, self-governance, and acknowledgment of and respect for sovereignty inspired progress to restore relationships among tribal, State, and Federal governments.⁴ Similarly, the efforts undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for AI/AN people to celebrate language, culture, and tradition. Extreme care must be taken when implementing health communication efforts in AI/AN communities.

Tribal health disparities impact messaging

Significant health disparities in AI/AN communities present challenges in addressing the opioid overdose crisis. The largest barriers to providing resources or access to treatment are transportation, consistent broadband/telecommunications, and funding.⁵ When implementing the *Rx Awareness* campaign, barriers to treatment must be considered.

Indian Health Service systems and tribal health organizations often have limited mental health and substance use disorder treatment options to address the complexity of the opioid overdose epidemic. The Indian Health Service and tribal health organizations typically support regional healthcare centers, which offer inpatient and outpatient services. Regional healthcare centers are located in hub communities and offer a variety of treatment and services to patients. Individual communities, villages, or reservations may have a single clinic or, in some instances, no healthcare provider at all. For people who use the tribal healthcare systems, it may be extremely difficult to access regional healthcare centers. Many people live in rural or remote locations and must travel long distances (sometimes by boat or plane) to see their healthcare provider.

“Nothing about us, without us,” summarizes the recommended philosophy and approach for engaging AI/AN communities and Native people more broadly.

Expanding Rx Awareness to tribal audiences

Consider AI/AN social justice and health issues, particularly the state of the opioid overdose epidemic within the specific community, while planning a campaign. There is a need to correct the misinterpretation that “everyone” is misusing prescription opioids and include positive messages to counter it. AI/AN people are eager for strategies and tools that not only help them address drug use in their communities, but that also emphasize that substance use disorders do not define AI/AN people.

Formative research activities for the *Rx Awareness* campaign identified themes that are applicable to AI/AN communities:

→ Intergenerational trauma:

- This trauma is the result of multiple historical events including the boarding school era, loss of cultural traditional practices, and colonization (see page 8 for terms and definitions).

→ Intimate partner violence, sexual assault, abuse, and neglect:

- Related to intergenerational trauma, sexual assault is prevalent in many AI/AN communities and represents the epidemic of violence in Indian Country and Alaska.⁶

→ Alcohol use disorder and polysubstance use:

- Outside of opioid use disorder, other substance use disorders, including alcohol use disorder, is prevalent in many rural, remote, and AI/AN communities.⁷

→ Connection to culture:

- The negative and systemic effects of colonization can lead to a desire to strengthen customary and traditional practices and achieve healing. Connecting to culture can be expressed on an individual and community-wide level.

Strength and resiliency of AI/AN people in the face of cultural genocide, trauma, and racism:

Resiliency among AI/AN people speaks to the ability to overcome adversity, be empowered, and inspire healing (refer to text box on next page for additional context on resiliency). When reinforcing traditional values, these concepts, messages, and themes build confidence and self-esteem and can help motivate individuals to seek treatment and recovery from substance use disorders. This form of resiliency should not be presented in the context of overcoming substance use disorder, though it could be connected.



Resilience

The term “resilience” is often used within treatment and recovery communities; however, many Alaska Natives and American Indians use the term differently. For American Indians and Alaska Natives, resilience speaks to the desire to persevere and overcome the economic, social, health, judicial, and environmental disparities experienced by AI/AN people.⁸ These disparities are a result of historical trauma and unresolved intergenerational grief caused by hundreds of years of oppression, marginalization, colonization, and racism.³

In this context, it is not required that AI/AN people overcome or resolve these adversities; rather, it speaks to their determination to rise above them and heal. Resilience is a unifying concept for many AI/AN people as it speaks to experiences and feelings that are held at the individual, community, regional, and national level. Resilience represents both personal strength as well as the collective strength of all AI/AN people, past and present.

It is wise to pay close attention to references and application of the term resilience, as AI/AN people can also experience resilience in the context of treatment and recovery, and the distinction should be clear when developing communications initiatives and messaging strategies for AI/AN populations.

Engaging AI/AN communities in campaign development

It is essential to engage AI/AN communities during the planning phase of campaign development. There are more than 500 federally recognized tribes in the United States.⁹ AI/AN people often, but not always, belong to a tribe, and are referred to as tribal citizens or tribal members. Tribal governments are sovereign nations—distinct governments that, with few exceptions, have the same powers as Federal and State governments to regulate their internal affairs.¹⁰ The following best practices will help you work with AI/AN communities to implement the *Rx Awareness* campaign:

Seek permission from tribal leadership before engaging tribal citizens.

- **Ask the local tribal leadership** if the materials are acceptable and applicable, even if using CDC’s AI/AN-specific campaign assets. Don’t assume; always ask permission.
- **Do not expect immediate action** or “quick turnaround responses” from tribes, tribal health organizations, or any other tribal entity or department in your campaign timeline. This may be attributed to a variety of factors, such as limited Internet connectivity in remote or rural communities, or under-resourced organizations with overburdened staff. Additionally, delays may be due to organizational requirements that call for vetting or approval from tribal leadership prior to responding to your request, as individuals are typically not authorized to speak on behalf of the tribe or represent other members of a tribe. It is helpful to understand the nuance, environment, and context of each AI/AN organization you intend to engage with and approach your outreach accordingly.
- **Establish a government-to-government consultation** between leaders of each respective organization if you are representing a State or county government. Tribal governments will issue approval for proceeding with developing and implementing a campaign based on the initial consultation.

Take time to build relationships and establish trust and respect.

- **Build relationships** beyond initial outreach and introductions prior to initiating health communication activities. Demonstrate transparency, humility, integrity, and authenticity as an “outsider” to build successful relationships with AI/AN communities.
- **Travel to AI/AN communities** and hold in-person meetings when possible. Follow all laws on tribal land. Do not expect to have full or open access to communities.

Seek active engagement and involvement at each step.

- **Always ask** what AI/AN people want or need. Spend resources developing messages, products, and tools that meet the specific needs of the community and individuals.
- **Don't project** or assume that challenges regarding prescription opioid misuse are consistent across all groups.
- **Don't generalize.**

Understand the role of an “outsider” and how to provide culturally competent support as a non-Native person or organization.

- **Don't rely** on superficial experiences or distant ancestry to identify with the AI/AN experience.
- **Avoid associating** the experience of AI/AN with other Indigenous populations throughout the world.
- **Don't overemphasize** personal connections to AI/AN people unless they are current, credible, and authentic.
- **Don't use tropes** or stereotypes.
- **Support self-determination**, capacity building within AI/AN communities, and allowing AI/AN people to guide the messaging solution.

Coordinate community roundtable discussions.

Organize a community roundtable of local people to develop key relationships, establish credibility, gain support, and contribute to cultural competency in materials development.

Approaches to planning a community roundtable discussion:

- ✓ Allow plenty of time for the organizing process.
- ✓ Invite multiple groups to the planning process or as attendees. Consider including tribal government, tribal court representatives, tribal health organizations, tribal housing, recovery and treatment providers, law enforcement, Elders' groups, youth leadership groups, and AI/AN policy and advocacy groups.
- ✓ Hold roundtable discussions at a neutral location, familiar to AI/AN people.
- ✓ Expect to listen and learn and allow the participants to lead the discussion.
- ✓ Be prepared for additional attendees beyond those invited to participate. This could include small children, Elders, or spouses.
- ✓ Ensure that roundtables have the appropriate size and attendance. Based on objectives, a small group of 10 participants may be sufficient, but groups of 20 to 30 could be appropriate.
- ✓ Do not interrupt people who are speaking.
- ✓ Understand the conversation may be extremely emotional. Consider including a counselor or traditional healer as a support attendee.
- ✓ Provide refreshments and food.
- ✓ Treat roundtables as a series, not a single exercise. Consider holding more than one meeting, in more than one location. Consider also conducting smaller groups. For example, hold an Elders-only group, one for leadership, and another for people in treatment.
- ✓ Be transparent about the information you are hoping to collect and what you plan to do with it. Be clear about what your objectives are.

Develop questions to guide the roundtable discussion. Share them in advance with the group prior to the discussion. Sample questions could include:

- 1 What do you think people in your area need to know about prescription opioid misuse?
- 2 What are the factors you see contributing to opioid misuse?
- 3 What inspires people to seek treatment and recovery?
- 4 What role does culture play in healing and recovery?

CDC engaged AI/AN communities in Alaska in roundtable discussions for Rx Awareness.

The purpose of the roundtables was to identify and explore emerging themes that contribute to prescription opioid misuse, abuse, and overdose and to establish relationships with AI/AN communities. Roundtables helped build familiarity and interest in *Rx Awareness* and created support for new materials for the AI/AN audience. CDC learned there was a dire need for prevention messaging as well as a need to connect people with resources and treatment.

The Native community requested educational materials to help the AI/AN audience better understand how to identify prescription opioids and symptoms of opioid use disorder. They also requested uplifting stories about healing that reflect culture, strength, and resiliency. CDC learned that identifying the role of intergenerational trauma and unresolved grief is imperative as it contributes to ongoing substance use and misuse in AI/AN communities.

Developing messages for tribal audiences

It is important to understand factors that contribute to and perpetuate addiction, as well as positive themes, in order to successfully implement the campaign in AI/AN communities. As you adapt *Rx Awareness* AI/AN materials, consider the following:

→ Risk Factors:

- Intergenerational trauma
- Intimate partner violence, sexual assault, abuse, and neglect
- Lack of recreational activities or safe spaces
- Negligible presence of law enforcement
- Inadequate education on safe and appropriate use of prescription opioids

→ Positive and Healing Themes:

- Strength and resiliency (as AI/AN people, not just in recovery)
- Power of connection to culture
- Revitalizing culture
- Self-determination

Recruiting testimonial participants from AI/AN communities

A good way to get started with recruitment is to first engage the local tribal council, who can refer you to resources and people. For example, the tribe may have a recovery and reentry program that could connect you to specific individuals. Note that some participants may be better suited for video, while other stories or candidates might be more effective for radio, blogs, or digital campaigns.

Other considerations when recruiting participants for the campaign:

- ✓ Ensure that the participant reflects the diversity in your community.
- ✓ Gain an understanding of the participant's reputation in their community, which is important in addition to performing an official background check to verify recovery. Would people in the community identify with this person?
- ✓ Avoid type-casting participants. They should be an accurate reflection of the community with good representation in multicultural communities.
- ✓ Avoid projecting your perception of AI/AN people on your participants. Allow them to represent their culture and people in a way that is authentic to them.
- ✓ Attempt to identify people who are passionate about sharing their story to help people.



Developing and using products

Research can be conducted to help inform product development and dissemination for AI/AN populations.

This toolkit references roundtable discussions, which may be an excellent source of information about topics of interest and media consumption behaviors. Other options may include key informant interviews or engaging a representative organization such as tribal government, tribal health organizations, a regional school, or a university serving AI/AN students.

Rx Awareness has several AI/AN-specific products that may be adapted for use in other national markets. Although the products feature Alaska Natives, their experiences draw upon common experiences and highlight shared cultural values relevant to other AI/AN populations across the country. Products should, if possible, be tested in markets prior to launch.

AI/AN products available include:

- Long-format testimonial videos
- 30-second videos for TV, digital, and social platforms
- 30-second radio spots
- Print and digital image assets
- One-pager: "What is an Opioid?"
- Campaign testimonial participant postcards
- Blog posts and matte articles

Expanding products

There are additional products that State, tribal, and non-profit organizations may wish to develop for their specific markets to help increase message reach:

- 1 Educational video:** An animated or testimonial style video using text and computer graphic images. The 3- to 5-minute video could discuss how to identify prescription opioid misuse as well as safe disposal best practices (especially relevant for areas without drug takeback). Video is an effective tool for individuals who speak English as a second language, for those with low reading skills, or for Elders.
- 2 Educational video series:** A series of short videos that explore key topics related to prescription opioid misuse. Example video topics include alternative pain management, traditional healing, and how to get help.
- 3 Out-of-home messaging:** A personal and direct way to reach AI/AN populations. Examples include sponsorship at sporting events or powwows as well as sponsorship or buying ad space on podcasts by AI/AN people. Sponsorships can align your brand, organization, or effort and communicate your investment in the health of AI/AN communities. These tactics have the potential to build trust and loyalty for *Rx Awareness* and its mission.

Guidance

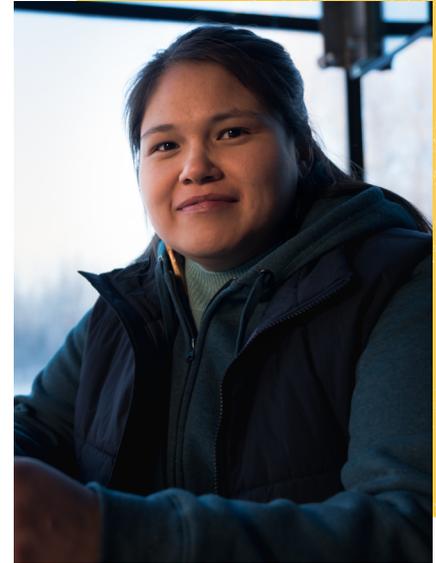
Recommendations for working with American Indians and Alaska Natives:

- **Represent AI/AN** people in a modern context that reinforces them as active members of society rather than existing on the fringes.
- **Use gain-framed messaging** over loss-framed.
- **Recognize diversity** among AI/AN people and the AI/AN experience, and speak to the unique aspects related to land, culture, and tradition.
- **Avoid tropes** and other stereotypical representations.
- **Celebrate the strength and resiliency** of AI/AN people in the face of cultural genocide, trauma, and racism.
 - Resiliency among AI/AN people speaks to the ability to overcome adversity, be empowered, and inspire healing. When reinforcing traditional values, these concepts, messages, and themes build confidence and self-esteem.
- **Avoid** using an "us versus them" tone.
- **Recognize** that a variety of issues are interwoven with the topic of prescription opioid misuse, abuse, and overdose.
 - They should be incorporated into the broader messaging solution.
- **Materials** considered to be helpful:
 - Media featuring AI/AN people
 - ✓ Uplifting themes
 - ✓ Addressing historical trauma
 - ✓ Sharing lived experiences
 - **Fact sheets** that cover prescription opioid basics, with pictures
 - **Educational presentations**
 - **Educational videos**

Selecting appropriate media channels and tactics

Choose media and communication channels that are relevant and accessible to the area. Learn about AI/AN people's media consumption behaviors and consider the following:

- Not all areas of the country have access to broadband Internet, especially rural and remote areas.
- Campaigns may be impacted by seasonality (e.g., subsistence seasons), pow-wows, or sporting events.
- Social media is generally very effective across youth, adults, and some (younger) Elders.
- Communication behaviors can vary widely from one area to the next.
- Alternative or nontraditional mediums should be considered, especially in communities with limited media access.
- For example, hanging a poster in a popular gathering place, such as the post office or community center, could be effective in an area that doesn't have Internet access. Another example could be working with the local Indian Health Service clinic to run video in waiting rooms.
- Partners should be used to help distribute or potentially fund media.



American Indian/Alaska Native Populations Key Terms and Definitions

This list defines key terms that are used throughout the toolkit. Reference these definitions for information about how to use these terms in communication products and in media.

Boarding School Era

Between 1869 and the 1960s, the U.S. Federal Government partnered with religious institutions to forcibly remove hundreds of thousands of American Indian and Alaska Native children from their villages and communities. Children were sent to government- or church-operated boarding schools where they were forbidden to speak their Native languages or practice their culture. Some schools assigned children numbers instead of names. Many children were sexually and physically abused and died. Indian Boarding School Policy expressly intended to implement cultural genocide through the removal and reprogramming of American Indian and Alaska Native children.¹¹

In 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act passed, giving Native American parents the legal right to refuse their child's placement in a school.¹² This law became a key component to protect the rights and culture of American Indian and Alaska Native families.

Colonization

Colonization is the process of settling among and establishing control of Indigenous people of an area.¹³ Colonization began during early contact with Europeans, and it is still prevalent today.

Cultural Affiliation

Cultural affiliation is a shared connection or identity that may be traced historically between an existing tribe and an earlier culture or group.¹⁴ Cultural affiliation is integral to the identity of Alaska Natives and American Indians and is typically shared upon first introduction with a new person, especially if introduced to another Indigenous individual.

Elder An Elder is a community member who has a great deal of wisdom, maturity, and cultural knowledge. Elders are typically older adults with a variety of life experiences, but they can also be younger people bearing the gift of wisdom. Elder is a designation typically given to someone by those in his or her community.¹⁵

Epigenetics **Epigenetics** is the study of how your behaviors and environment can cause changes that affect the way your genes work. Epigenetic markers have been shown to be affected by natural, built, and social environmental exposures such as nutrition, stress, and air pollution. Epigenetic markers can change over time and can also be inherited.¹⁶

Historical Trauma Historical trauma is the result of hundreds of years of oppression, colonization, and systemic racism that continues to impact American Indian and Alaska Native lives today. It is the total emotional and psychological wounds over the lifespan and across generations that comes from large-scale group trauma. Unresolved grief is part of historical trauma and is defined by the length of the grieving and its interference with a person's grief symptoms in their everyday life. Symptoms of unresolved grief can range in intensity and can contribute to high rates of suicide, homicide, domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, substance abuse and addiction, as well as other social problems among American Indians and Alaska Natives.¹⁷

Indian Country Indian Country refers to all land within an Indian reservation or held in trust by the U.S. Federal Government. Additionally, any dependent Native community within the borders of the United States may be considered Indian Country. Indian Country now spans thousands of rural areas, towns, and cities where Native Americans live.¹⁸

Intergenerational Grief Intergenerational grief is grief or trauma that is felt from one generation to the next and sometimes through many generations.¹⁹ The impact of this grief can be both mental and physical.

Native Native or Indigenous people are the original inhabitants of an area. "Native" should always be capitalized when used alone or in a sentence. When referring to a Native or Indigenous person in Alaska, this person is an "Alaska Native." This is not interchangeable with "Native Alaskan," which refers to any individual born in the state of Alaska regardless of race or ethnicity. People who are Indigenous to the contiguous United States may be appropriately referred to as either "Native American" or "American Indian."²⁰

Resilience Resilience represents both personal strength and the collective strength of all Native people past, present, and future. It is built and strengthened through culture, spirituality, shared values, and a strong sense of identity.²¹ Their resilience speaks to the spirit and desire to overcome racial, economic, social, health, and environmental disparities experienced by Native people and to heal.

Self-determination Through the Self-determination and Education Assistance Act, tribes have the right to assume responsibility for the programs and services administered to them on behalf of the U.S. Federal Government.²² Self-determination also has a broader meaning when referring to membership in a Native person's tribal government or identity as a tribal citizen. These are the freedoms promised through treaties and legislation throughout the history of the United States.⁵

Sovereignty

Sovereignty, specifically tribal sovereignty, refers to the right of American Indians and Alaska Natives to govern themselves. The U.S. Constitution recognizes Indian tribes as distinct governments with most of the same powers as federal and state governments to regulate their internal affairs.¹¹

Tribal Government

Each federally recognized tribe has its own government called a tribal government. Tribal governments interact with the federal government as sovereign nations and have legal jurisdiction over their own land. Tribal sovereignty was formed as a result of hundreds of treaties and federal actions between the U.S. government and Native American and Alaska Native tribes.¹²

Tribal Health Organization

Tribal health organizations are recognized direct service providers that deliver healthcare and manage healthcare facilities for American Indian and Alaska Native communities and tribes.²³ There are also tribal health organizations that serve non-Native people, if they carry the status of a federally qualified health center.

Tribal Member

Tribal membership is a political status given to an Alaska Native or American Indian who is an enrolled member of one of the 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States.²⁴ There are many Native people who do not have tribal membership status but are still considered Alaska Native or American Indian based on their heritage or genetic background.

Tribe

The U.S. government defines a federally recognized tribe as an American Indian or Alaska Native tribe that has a government-to-government relationship with the United States with responsibilities, powers, limitations, and obligations that come with it.²⁵ There are tribes that are not federally recognized for a variety of reasons. For the purposes of developing media, these tribes should be approached similarly to their federally recognized counterparts. Federally recognized tribes have natural rights to self-government (tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive some federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationships with the U.S. government.¹⁵ There are currently 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.¹⁵

Trope

A trope is any word used in a figure of speech or a recurring theme in literature.²⁶ Media often feature many kinds of Alaska Native and Native American tropes, which are damaging and false representations. Examples include the “Mystical Native American” who is always in tune with nature, the “Indian Princess” or chief’s daughter, the “Stoic Indian” who never speaks, or the “Savage Indian” who is typically portrayed as an uncivilized villain. It is important to note that when featuring Native people in media, a story is being told on their behalf. Public perception is highly influenced through media, so proper and realistic representation is crucial for the protection of American Indian Peoples’ rights, both those that are inherent and those affirmed by treaties, litigation, and legislation.

Unresolved Grief

Unresolved grief is part of historical trauma and is defined by the duration of the grieving and its interference with a person’s grief symptoms in their everyday life. Symptoms of unresolved grief can range in intensity and can contribute to high rates of suicide, homicide, domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, substance use and substance use disorder, as well as other social problems among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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