



As Indian people we have been conducting our own health studies for hundreds of years. Finding ways to heal our bodies is part of our culture. The California Tribal Epidemiology Center (CTEC) goals are the same as ours. CTEC wants healthier communities and to do that together we need good health information.

CTEC has been seeking input from American Indian community members as to what they think are the most important health concerns in their community. In a survey, people were asked to rank their top 10 health concerns out of a list of 27 health topics. An 'other' option was provided for people to fill in if a concern was not listed.

CTEC priorities are a combined result of the 499 surveys collected as of June 2009 at consultations with CTEC-member tribal health programs, and at various California Indian conferences and gatherings. People could choose more than one category: 204 respondents stated they were clinic staff, 97 were health board members, 59 were tribal council members, and 247 were community members.

Behavioral health refers to the relationship between human behavior and the well-being of the body, mind, and spirit. It includes, mental health, and the abuse of substances, such as drugs, tobacco and alcohol. Substance abuse frequently disrupts family and community life and is often associated with injuries such as car wrecks, and violence.

Survey respondents ranked behavioral health as being of high concern in Indian Country.

In California, American Indians and Alaska Natives who used tribal health programs were 1.7 times more likely to be hospitalized for alcohol and drug-related conditions than Whites.

Drug Abuse

Of the topics included in behavioral health, drug abuse was ranked to be the highest concern in our communities, with an overall rank of number 2 for CTEC priorities. Nearly half (47% or 237) of those surveyed ranked drug abuse as a top 5 health concern. Drug abuse includes both illegal substances and non-medical use of prescription pills -- all of which can lead to heart problems, overdoses, and death. Drug abuse, especially methamphetamine use, has been a growing concern for our communities. It is also associated with injuries such as car wrecks, violence, and sexually transmitted diseases. Drug abuse commonly disrupts family, work, and community life.



Alcohol Abuse

Another CTEC priority is alcohol abuse, with 40% (n=199) ranking alcohol abuse as a top 5 health concern. Alcohol abuse is associated with violence, injuries such as car wrecks and drowning, teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. It can lead to heart disease, cancer, and liver disease.

Alcohol-related deaths are almost 7 times higher in American Indians and Alaska Natives than the US population.

Estimates of binge drinking represent the risk of immediate alcohol related health consequences. Binge drinking is considered to be 5 or more drinks at a time for males and 4 or more drinks at a time for females. According to the California Health Interview Survey, 18% (95% Confidence Interval (CI): 15.9%-19.2%) of American Indians/Alaska Natives reported binge drinking in the past month compared to 15% (CI: 14.7%-15.5%) of non-Hispanic Whites in California.

Mental Health

Screening and seeking help for mental health issues will help to ensure the mind stays well. Respondents to the CTEC survey ranked mental health as the 5th health concern for the community, with 29% or 143 of the people ranking it in their top five health concerns. Depression is the most common mental health issue, yet it is treatable--screening for it is an important preventative measure. More than a quarter (27% or 9,062) of adult patients at reporting California tribal health clinics were screened for depression. The Healthy People 2010 goal for the US is to screen at least 50% of patients 18 years and older for depression.

Non-Traditional Tobacco Use

Many studies have shown that American Indians/Alaska Natives use commercial tobacco – cigarettes and chewing tobacco – at higher rates than other races and ethnicities. 9% (n=46) of those surveyed ranked tobacco use as a top 5 health concern in their community. It is a major risk factor for lung cancer, chronic lung diseases, heart disease, and stroke.

Commercial tobacco use is the most preventable cause of disease and death in the United States.

Comments made by people on Behavioral Health in Indian Country:

Drug abuse is killing our Native People and our young children are learning it.

Alcohol use is the start to abuse that can occur in youth who is our future tribal leadership.

Mental health issues contribute to overall well being, a sound mind is a basic building block.

Thank you for those who took the time to fill out a survey. Your answers help us focus our work to provide better services to American Indians.

*For more information contact CTEC:
By email at epicenter@crihb.net or by phone at (916) 929-9761*