



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.

Injuries may be intentional or unintentional. Intentional injuries include self inflicted and interpersonal acts of violence, such as: domestic violence, suicide, or those related to the use of fire arms. Unintentional injuries may be from car wrecks, drowning, falls, poisonings, and burns from a fire.

Even though survey respondents ranked injuries as not being of the highest concern in Indian Country, injuries are disproportionately higher in Native communities compared to other race/ethnic groups and are one of the leading causes of death.

*In California, American Indians and Alaska Natives who used tribal health programs were 1.5 times more likely to be hospitalized for injuries and poisonings than Whites.*

## **Domestic Violence**

Of the injuries, domestic violence was ranked to be the highest concern in our communities, with an overall rank of number 19 for CTEC priorities. 33% (n=164) of those surveyed ranked domestic violence as a top 10 health concern. Domestic violence and abuse are behaviors used by one person in a relationship to control the other. These behaviors can include mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse. Domestic violence is often associated with alcohol and drug abuse, and is known to disrupt the family and community. Domestic violence, whether it is by a family member or friend, continues to affect Native communities at a higher rate than other races/ethnicities.



## Suicide

Suicide may occur for a number of reasons, including depression, emotional stress, guilt, anxiety, physical pain, financial problems, or other difficult situations. Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the United States. Almost a quarter (24% or 121) of people completing the survey ranked suicide as being one of the top 10 health concerns for their community, with an overall ranking of number 22 for CTEC priority areas.

*American Indians aged 25 to 29 years have the highest rate of suicide among any racial group of the same age.*

Depression is associated with more than two-thirds of suicides, and is the most common mental health issue. The California Health Interview Survey shows that almost 16% (95% Confidence Interval (CI): 12.7%-18.9%) of American Indians and Alaska Natives reported psychological distress in the past year compared to 8% (CI: 7.6%-8.8%) of non-Hispanic Whites in California. In the past month 7% (CI: 4.9%-8.6%) of American Indians and Alaska Natives reported psychological distress in comparison to 3% (CI: 2.7%-3.4%) of non-Hispanic Whites. Psychological distress was determined using the Kessler 6 Series, looking at variables such as feeling restless, depressed, nervous, and worthless. Mental health screening is an important preventative measure, since many health conditions such as depression are treatable. Community awareness of suicide is also important for the health of our people.

## Unintentional Injuries

Unintentional injuries or accidents are common and can occur at any time. Respondents to the CTEC survey ranked unintentional injuries as the 24<sup>th</sup> health concern for the community, with 21% (n=130) of people ranking it in their top ten health concerns. Ways to prevent or diminish the effects of unintentional injuries include: wearing a seatbelt or having a child use a car seat, wearing a bicycle helmet, installing hand rails to prevent falls, wearing a life vest while swimming, and installing a smoke and carbon monoxide alarm in the home.

*Unintentional injuries are the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives in the US.*

Unintentional injuries are often associated with drug and alcohol abuse, which were ranked, respectively, as the second and third health priorities for CTEC.

### **Comments made by people on Injuries in Indian Country:**

*I feel like the prevalence of domestic violence contributes to many other health issues.*

*Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.*

*We live in a very small and isolated community. A death here causes incredible waves throughout the whole community. Often times the injury is related to drug or alcohol abuse.*

*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.*