



CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH

AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

Fast Facts on Native American Youth and Indian Country

General Information

- There are **565 federally-recognized tribes in 35 states** in the United States. A full list can be downloaded from the Bureau of Indian Affairs by clicking [here](#).
- [US Census Bureau statistics](#) estimate that about **1.5 percent of the US population** – around 4.5 million individuals – self-identifies American Indian or Alaska Native descent. Of these, an estimated 1.9 million are eligible for federal services.
- In 2000, 47 percent of AI/ANs lived on reservations or other US Census-defined tribal areas ([US Dept. of Education](#)).
- 28.3 percent of Native Americans are below the age of 18 ([2008 Census](#)). The media age of this group is 29.7 years ([2009 census](#)).
- Over 2.1 million Native Americans are under the age of 24.

Federal Services for Native Americans

- The **Indian Health Service (IHS)** carries out the federal government's trust responsibility to provide federal health care services to Native Americans. More than half of the Indian health programs are contracted or compacted from IHS and operated by the tribe or tribal organizations. The IHS directly operates 122 hospitals, health centers, health stations and school health centers, and assists tribes in managing 538 such facilities and Alaska Village clinics ([IHS, 2011](#)).
- The IHS estimates that historically, **annual Congressional appropriations have only met 52 percent of American Indian and Alaska Natives' health care needs** ([IHS Fact Sheet](#)).
- The [Bureau of Indian Education \(BIE\)](#) provides educational opportunities to American Indians and Alaska Natives, by funding elementary and secondary schools. BIE directly operates 59 of these schools, while another 124 are operated by tribes under BIE

contracts or grants. The schools are located on 64 reservations in 23 states, serving about 42,000 Indian students. The BIE also funds 26 tribal colleges and universities.

- As of 2006, there were only 2,380 Bureau of Indian Affairs and tribal uniformed officers to cover over 56 million acres of tribal lands ([NCAI](#)). The [Tribal Law and Order Act](#) of 2010 set out to address this and many other related issues.
- As of 2002, out of tribes in the lower 48 United States, 60 percent had some form of judicial system, and 56 percent had a formal tribal court ([Bureau of Justice Statistics](#)).

Challenges in Indian Country

As a result of historical trauma, chronically underfunded federal programs, and broken promises on the part of the US government, American Indians and Alaska Natives experience many health, educational and economic disparities compared to the general population.

- The **poverty rate** among Native Americans in 2009 was 23.6% ([2009 census](#)), and 32.4% of the under-18 AI/AN population lives in poverty (NCAI Policy Research Center).
- Average Native American household income is \$33,300, while the national average is \$46,200. According to the 2000 Census, Indians living in Indian Country have incomes less than half the national average (Duthu, N. Bruce. *American Indians and the Law*, New York: Penguin Group, 2008. Print. Page 118).
- 24.1 percent of AI/ANs lack health insurance coverage ([2009 census data](#)) and rely solely on the Indian health system. This is one factor leading to major **health disparities** among the AI/AN population:
 - Alcoholism mortality rates are 514 percent higher than the general population.
 - Suicide rates are more than double, and Native teens experience the highest rate of suicide of any population group in the United States.
 - Diabetes incidence is 177 percent higher, with the highest rate of type 2 diabetes of any specific population in the U.S.
 - Tuberculosis incidence is 500 percent higher.
- The national graduation rate for American Indian high school students was 49.3 percent for the 2003-4 school year, compared with 76.2 percent for white students. Just 13.3 percent of Native Americans have undergraduate degrees, versus 24.4 percent of the general population ([NIEA](#)).

Statistics on Native American Youth

- According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 16 percent of students at Bureau of Indian Affairs schools in 2001 reported having attempted suicide in the preceding 12 months.
- About 2 percent of US children are American Indian/Alaska Native, but AI/ANs represent 8.4 percent of the children in foster care. ([NICWA. & Kids Are Waiting](#), 2007)
- AI/AN youth are arrested at a rate of 3 times the national average, and 79% of youth in the Federal Bureau of Prison's custody are AI/AN. ([Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), 2004)
- Violence, including intentional injuries, homicide and suicide account for 75% of deaths for AI/AN youth age 12-20.
- AI/ANs attain the lowest level of education of any racial or ethnic group in the United States. Graduation rates for AI/AN high school students hover around 50% nationwide, as compared to over 75% for white students. ([NIEA](#))
- Adolescent AI/ANs have death rates 2 to 5 times the rate of Whites in the same age group ([SAMHSA](#)), resulting from higher levels of suicide and a variety of risky behaviors.
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death – and 2.5 times the national rate – for AI/AN youth in the 15-24 age group.
- 22% of females and 12% of males reported to have attempted suicide, while 5% had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year.
- The reported rate of binge alcohol use over the past month was higher among AI/AN adults than the national average (30.6 percent vs. 24.5 percent). ([SAMHSA](#))
- Only 1 in 8 (12.6 percent) of AI/AN adults (24,000 people) in need of alcohol or illicit drug use treatment in the past year received treatment at a specialty facility.