

Urban American Indian Perspectives on Health Care in Addressing Tobacco in Colorado's Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Communities

A Community Blueprint for Action

A report prepared by the Colorado Community Coalition for Health Equity

July 2010

American Indian Cultural Considerations

In Colorado, most American Indians are either broadly dispersed across the Denver area or on rural reservations. Lack of transportation resources make it challenging to gather or provide services...

American Indians come from hundreds of different tribes and identity is tribal first.

Family, Unity, Culture, Generosity, and Spirituality are primary values in American Indian Culture. Unity is highly valued and provides the community its strength. Unity is particularly strong on the two reservations in Southwestern Colorado.

Women and elders are greatly respected.

There is a wide spread feeling of fatalism and hopelessness among American Indian people. Some feel disenfranchised and have become accepting of lower quality of care.

Many have adopted the idea that they do not deserve high quality care.

Often when they see their families in ill health they feel there is nothing they can do about it and that their fate is predetermined.

Culture and Education are the primary things that offer this community hope. They do not know the health information that we assume they know. They may have heard it but do not understand it.

Most are very private people and don't want to share their troubles, especially with people from outside of their community.

Historical trauma has led to high levels of mistrust. "We have been lied to a lot". "Just be supportive, be there and do not lie".

There is a belief that the care at white hospitals is better but is not available to them as most can not pay for it. Limited free health services are available on reservations as a result of treaties Tribes made with the US Government. They will go there to get free medications but services are very limited that care for serious illness is often not available.

There is great mistrust of government and health care on the reservations, “The government is trying to kill us off”, “the doctors are just there to get paid or do internships so we aren’t getting the best”.

Many, especially elders will not seek care even in emergencies due to past bad experiences. They will use native medicine or herbal remedies but many do not have access to traditional healers or modern medicine.

Many have been treated badly and shamed because of their lifestyle, hygiene or appearance.

There is some resistance to talking about chronic disease due to the cultural belief that to discuss it invites it into your life but once they have some education they become hungry for more.

Ceremonial use of tobacco is a positive component of Native American culture that can lead to more positive health outcomes.

Many have received low quality health care or have been mistreated by providers. They often avoid medical care even in emergencies.

This group often takes non-traditional approaches to care for their health. Healthcare is often limited by access to care due to lack of insurance, or mistrust of western medicine and healthcare. Many American Indians do not have access to traditional healers or modern medicine.

Communications: When working with tribes or on reservations it is important to begin all communications through the tribal elders.

Many in the Denver area feel particularly connected to the Denver Indian Center. Fliers at the DIC was the most widely suggested as a way to inform the community

Teresa Halsey –Community E-Newsletter

American Indian Websites

The March Powwow is the major community event. “I believe when I go to the Powwow I feel that spirit and it empowers me to stay native because we lose our nationality being so entwined with different other minorities”.