



Celebrating Native American Heritage Month

National American Indian & Alaska Native School Mental Health Program Statement

School Mental Health Program



WHAT IS HERITAGE?

Most people can agree on what defines heritage. It can be a tangible item or property that is passed down to an heir. Heritage can also be a legacy or tradition handed down by an ancestor. One's own birthright can determine one's heritage. The essence of heritage reflects the traditions, accomplishments, and systems of belief, which are all part of the history of a group or nation. Our Native people are that same group whose heritage goes back hundreds of years before the United States of America came into existence.

THE STORY AND PURPOSE

Over a century ago, several states enacted American Indian Day to recognize Native Americans' history and heritage at various times throughout the calendar year. This came out of initiatives led by our Native ancestors, Dr. Arthur C. Parker, Seneca; Red Fox James, Blackfoot; and Rev. Sherman Coolidge, Arapahoe (*Native American Heritage Month, 2021*). Native American Awareness Week was first declared October 10-16, 1976 as part of the nation's bicentennial commemoration under the authority of President Gerald Ford (*United States Senate, 2021*). In 1986, Congress passed a Joint Resolution to request that former President Ronald Reagan designate November 23–30, 1986, as American Indian Week (*Public Broadcasting Service, 2021*).

Congress continued this practice in subsequent years, declaring one week as Native American Indian Heritage Week during the autumn months. Years later, George W. Bush signed into law that the month of November be a time to celebrate traditions, honor culture, and recognize contributions by Native Americans and Alaska Natives in what is now named as Native American Heritage Month.

While a month-long celebration of the rich cultures, traditions, and histories of Native people is well-intended, a month simply is not enough. To acknowledge key contributions of Native Americans and Alaska Natives during a single month allows us to a limited amount of time educating people, young and old, about the tribes across the United States. We can raise awareness about colonization and mistreatment for hundreds of years against Native people and the challenges many still face today, however, there is still more to be done.

We can demonstrate and learn about traditions through storytelling, dance, art, food, and music, about the history of those Indigenous to the land known as the United States of America. We can research history, visit tribal lands, or familiarize ourselves with any of the almost 600 tribes that are federally recognized (*National Congress of American Indians, 2021*). In doing this, we still may not know about the hundreds of others that are not acknowledged by the United States government.

OUR STORY, OUR PURPOSE

Although the United States of America recognizes November as Native American Heritage Month, we acknowledge along with our people across Indian country that our heritage is to be honored every day. Our Native peoples' traditions, culture, and contributions exceed what any history book has ever documented. Our story has many beginnings with the various creation stories told among our tribes. Our story continues over hundreds of years of facing abuse and neglect. Our story remains one of time-honored traditions and a strong culture. Our story permeates all aspects of life today in the United States of America. Our purpose is to stay resilient and keep our culture alive!



OUR VISION, OUR RESILIENCE

We expect to continue to be proud of who we are, including our heritage. In the United States, there are 26 states and several cities and bodies of water whose names come from our Native American heritage (*United States Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, 1974*). We are connected to Indigenous people across the world. The US Census states there were 5.2 million American Indians and Alaskan Natives living in the US in 2010; 7.1 million in 2020; and there are projected to be 10.1 million by July 2060 (*Department of Defense Education Activity, 2021*).

We have strength in knowing our stories. We have the power to reclaim our languages. We have been grounded in our culture. We have wisdom knowing our ancestry. We have each other to build community. We are resilient because we are Indigenous.

A COLLABORATION

Our Native communities across the country remain committed to addressing the issues they face. The Native Center for Behavioral Health is a research center at the University of Iowa's College of Public Health committed to developing programs to support the behavioral health workforce in Native American and Alaska Native communities across the country.

Through the Native Center for Behavioral Health, we address timely issues that impact our Indigenous communities' health and wellness. Our current projects include three technology transfer programs funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the areas of addiction (ATTC), mental health (MHTTC), and prevention (PTTC), as well as tribal opioid response technical assistance (TOR TA), mental health technical assistance for K-12 schools (MHTTC-Supplement), and a Tribal College and University Initiative. We also host a Leadership Academy for Native American and Alaska Native behavioral health professionals.

Our mission is to serve as subject-matter experts and critical authorities on resources for culturally informed prevention practices, addiction treatment, recovery, and mental health services, supporting behavioral health professionals working with Native communities. We focus on using evidence and experience-based methods and traditional cultural practices to treat those suffering from substance use and other behavioral health disorders and provide technical assistance to communities in crisis due to a mental health or addiction epidemic. By partnering with local Native behavioral health workforce members, we utilize Indigenous knowledge to create culturally informed experiences for providers and clients.

Indigenous ways of knowing weave our traditions, our language, our food, and our people into stories that cannot be erased nor forgotten.



Questions? Contact:

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National American Indian & Alaska Native

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



**Native Center for
Behavioral Health**

IOWA

SAMHSA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

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