

## **Cancer in Alaska Native Women: Key Points**

### **Vital Statistics and Social Indicators**

- There are about 106,000 Alaska Natives, who account for 15 percent of the residents of the state of Alaska.
- There are about 24,500 adult (at least 20 years old) Alaska Native females.
- Compared with U.S. women overall, Alaska Native women are relatively young, have large families, have low incomes and high living expenses, have low levels of education, and are disproportionately living in single-parent households.
- Two thirds of Alaska Natives live in rural villages, many of which are isolated from the outside world, including health care facilities, by great distances and extreme weather conditions.

### **Cancer Rates, Mortality, and Risk Factors**

- Age-adjusted cancer incidence rates for Alaska Natives are similar to, if not higher than, those of other Americans.
- From 1992 to 1998, Alaskan Natives experienced a 4.3 percent annual increase in incidence rates for all cancers combined, an increase much higher than the 0.3 percent annual increase seen among U.S. Whites.
- In 1993, cancer became the leading cause of death among Alaska Native women.
- Alaska Native women have the highest mortality rate of all ethnic groups for all cancers combined and for colorectal and lung cancers.
- Major cancer risk factors for Alaska Native women include tobacco and alcohol use; poor diet, a sedentary lifestyle, and obesity; and limited access to health care.

### **Data Limitations and Future Directions**

- Problems with the Alaska Native Tumor Registry include: limited geographic scope, racial misclassification, undercounting, and insufficient numbers from which to draw conclusions.
- Because data about Alaska Native cancer cases are limited, cautious interpretation is required to avoid erroneous conclusions.
- Cooperation among health providers, the government, and Native communities can be harnessed to design and carry out successful cancer prevention and control programs.