

AMERICAN INDIANS/ ALASKA NATIVES & CANCER



WHO WE ARE

There are over 560 federally recognized tribes and over 100 state recognized tribes, of which each has its own unique culture. Thus, there is great diversity within American Indian and Alaska Native political, social, cultural, and spiritual communities. ⁽¹⁾ As was true in earlier years,⁽²⁾ preliminary data from US Census 2000 continues to report American Indians and Alaska Natives as having younger median age in comparison to other racial groups. ⁽³⁾ Since cancer is primarily a disease that affects older people, this younger median age partially explains why cancer appears to be less common among selected Native communities. Likewise, American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to be among the poorest populations in the US ^(3,4) There are 217 native languages spoken today and most, if not all, indigenous languages do not include a word for "cancer". ⁽⁵⁾ According to US Census Bureau August 2000 Population Estimates, the states with the highest numbers of American Indians are California (313,642), Oklahoma (262,581), Arizona (261,168), New Mexico (165,444), Washington (104,819), Alaska (101,352), North Carolina (99,277), Texas (97,412), New York (76,755), and Florida (60,358). ⁽³⁾ The states with the highest percentage of American Indians and Alaska Natives include Alaska (16.4%), New Mexico (9.5%), South Dakota (8.2%), Oklahoma (7.8%), Montana (6.5%), Arizona (5.5%), North Dakota (4.8%), Wyoming (2.3%), Washington (1.8%), and Nevada (1.8%). ⁽³⁾ Approximately 60% of the American Indian and Alaska Native population reside in urban areas with the highest number of American Indians in Los Angeles, California while the urban area with the highest number of Alaska Natives is Anchorage, Alaska. ^(3,4)

STATISTICAL CANCER FACTS FOR AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES

- ◆ Cancer rates which were previously reported to be lower in American Indian and Alaska Natives have been shown to be increasing in the past twenty years. ^(6,7)
- ◆ Cancer is the second leading cause of death among American Indians and Alaska Natives over the age of 45. ^(6,7)



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- ◆ Cancer data for American Indians/Alaska Natives from one region of the country cannot be used to generalize to Native people living in another part of the country. The types of cancer experienced within Native communities varies significantly by geographic region with some unusual patterns (e.g., colon and lung cancer among Alaska Natives, lung, cervical, breast, and prostate cancer among Northern Plains tribes, stomach and gallbladder cancer among southwestern tribes).⁽⁷⁻¹⁰⁾
 - ◆ Alaska Natives are among the racial groups which have the highest mortality rates for “all cancers combined” in comparison with all other racial groups.⁽¹¹⁾
 - ◆ American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to have the poorest survival from “all cancers combined” than any other racial group.⁽¹²⁻¹⁵⁾
 - ◆ There is no single national database that accurately presents comprehensive cancer data for American Indians. There are multiple errors and limitations within American Indian/Alaska Native cancer data, which typically result in under-counting the number of cancer cases and deaths.^(8,14,16-29)
 - ◆ There is a 40-50% misclassification of American Indians as either White or Hispanic.⁽³⁰⁾ Misclassification is primarily due to (a) use of Spanish surnames to determine race; (b) personal observation by data collectors to determine race; (c) lack of American Indian/Alaska Native response category on forms; (d) inconsistent definitions of American Indians/Alaska Natives; (e) federal recognition of tribal Nation in addition to state-recognition (i.e., non-federally recognized tribal member may not identify as American Indians/Alaska Natives).⁽²⁶⁾
 - ◆ Collapsing racial categories, such as Asians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Alaska Natives into a single racial category of “other” is of no benefit to public health policy makers, researchers, tribal planners, and so on. The “Other” data category has the same effectiveness as having no data or being excluded from a study or study findings.^(8,26)
 - ◆ Lung cancer is the most common type of cancer death in eight of the nine Indian Health Service (IHS) Areas (three IHS Areas not included due to significant statistical errors).⁽³¹⁾
 - ◆ Common cancers in the general population are also common to American Indian/Alaska Native communities, but there are also rarer cancers that are seen disproportionately in some American Indians/Alaska Natives as follows:
 - a. Elevated stomach and gallbladder among Arizona and New Mexico American Indians;
 - b. Lung, colorectal, cervix, prostate, kidney and stomach for Alaska Natives; and
 - c. Elevated lung, prostate and cervix cancer among Northern Plains American Indians.⁽³¹⁾
 - ◆ National Interview Survey data show that adult smoking among American Indians and Alaska Natives is the highest (40%) of the five racial and ethnic groups.⁽³²⁾
 - ◆ The prevalence of cigarette smoking is higher for all American Indian tribes (41.7% for men and 38.1% for women), except Arizona women, in comparison to general population rates (men 23.6% and women 16.7%).⁽³²⁻³⁴⁾
 - ◆ There is very limited data on the familial patterns of cancer in American Indian/Alaska Native communities (i.e., Roubidoux and Kaur data from Alaska, Arizona and South Dakota indicate 8-12% Native patients reporting of first degree relatives with breast cancer).⁽³⁵⁾
 - ◆ Participants in most clinical trials typically have higher education (i.e., college degree) and high incomes.⁽³⁶⁾ American Indians and Alaska Natives who have less than a college degree are rarely included in any type of cancer clinical trials (i.e., prevention, screening / early detection, diagnosis, treatment, quality of life).⁽³⁷⁾
 - ◆ Access to health care is a problem for American Indians and Alaska Natives, who are second only to Hispanics in lacking health insurance.⁽⁹⁾
 - ◆ Wilson-Taylor’s study on quality of breast cancer care for women living in New Mexico found significant disparities in time to first cancer-directed surgery for American Indian women for every interval examined, compared to non-Hispanic White women. Controlling for age, stage, grade and census-tract poverty-level, American Indian women were four times more likely to receive their first cancer-directed surgery more than six months (186 days) after diagnosis.⁽³⁸⁾
 - ◆ The shortage of health care professionals working in American Indian and Alaska Native communities - fewer than 90 doctors for every 100,000 Indians, compared to 229 per 100,000 nationally - makes health care access an even more challenging issue to address among the population.⁽³⁹⁾
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- ◆ Contrary to the general opinion that the Indian Health Service (IHS) provides health care to all American Indians and Alaska Natives, IHS is under-funded by the US Congress on average by about 40% of the documented health care need, which results in the inability of Native patients to access health care. ^(2,25)

Additional facts and information on American Indian/Alaska Native populations can be found at: <http://iccnetwork.org/cancerfacts>

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