## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

## **Tribal Statewide Health Improvement Partnership and Tribal Tobacco Programs**



Data shows that American Indians suffer some of the highest rates of chronic disease and have the lowest life expectancy in the United States, due to colonization and cultural genocide, which devastated traditional systems that naturally fostered physical activity, healthy diet, use of traditional tobacco and spiritual connection with the land.

Mainstream public health efforts have often lacked community-specific cultural tailoring to address poor health outcomes in the American Indian population, and as a result have been largely unsuccessful. In 2013, the Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Partnership and Tobacco Free Communities grant programs identified a need to gather input from American Indian stakeholders on the strategies being utilized to reduce commercial tobacco use and diet-related chronic diseases in their communities.

These conversations helped transform MDH's work and their approach to addressing the significant and long-standing health disparities that exist among American Indians in Minnesota. The most substantial result of this work is that MDH's Tribal SHIP and Tribal Tobacco Grants Program is constructing a new narrative around health with an understanding that well-being is achieved in the community by people working together to create just economic, social and environmental conditions that promote health.

The program has strived to effectively honor, uphold and celebrate tribal sovereignty and the special relationships that tribal nations hold with states. With the help of tribal communities, the American Indian Cancer Foundation, NDSU's American Indian Public Health Resource Center, and others, tribal health advocacy is being done in a way that seriously considers social, cultural and economic impacts, while being rooted in tribal sovereignty and self-determination, equitable and respectful relationships, cultural identity and in the recognition of the strength and resilience of American Indian communities.

Tribal communities have long known that reclaiming values and integrating cultural practices into health-equity work is chronic disease prevention and are bringing this to the forefront of every aspect of life. MDH's Tribal SHIP and Tribal Tobacco Grants Program recognizes this important attribute of

## TRIBAL STATEWIDE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP AND TRIBAL TOBACCO PROGRAMS

American Indian communities and is deliberate in honoring and uplifting the cultural diversity that American Indians contribute to a vibrant and healthy Minnesota.

The Tribal SHIP and Tribal Tobacco Grants Program strives to provide opportunities for tribal communities to actualize culturally driven healthy eating, active living and traditional and commercial tobacco efforts. This effort has not only been successful in Minnesota, it is now seen as a model for how states can successfully partner with tribal nations to lower chronic disease incidence and mortality rates.

## At a glance: Tribal SHIP and Tribal Tobacco Grants Program successes

- MDH and technical assistance providers have developed and implemented working relationships with all ten of the tribal grantees.
- More than 250 training and technical assistance activities have been provided since June 2016.
- Six tribal communities have health coalitions and committees each with their own structure, goals and objectives developed by community members to drive and support their initiatives.
- Sustainable efforts and policies have been implemented to uphold the special relationship tribes have with traditional tobacco, to support healthy foods policies for meetings and events, to provide support for breastfeeding areas/policies, to incorporate indigenous language in community walking/biking paths, to develop community medicinal and Indigenous food gardens and to support educational classes, among others.

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