

## ***Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness***

### ***for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities***

Appendix I: Working with American Indian and Alaska Native Communities:  
Increasing Cultural Competency

Adapted from *American Indian Alaska Native Communication, Learning Styles, and Resources*, retrieved from Native American Cancer Research, September 21, 2009 at [http://www.natamcancer.org/handouts/01-22-08\\_obj3\\_communication\\_HND.pdf](http://www.natamcancer.org/handouts/01-22-08_obj3_communication_HND.pdf).

No written document can fully prepare a person to work in cultures different from their own. Still, this overview will provide a few helpful tips as one begins to form trusting relationships with American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

The best way of learning how to work with any community or tribe is to ask questions and listen to the answers. Once a person has taken the time to really listen, then they will gain a better understanding of the community or tribal needs and ways of working.

#### **Common Values among Natives**

- Sharing and generosity
- Allegiance to family, community, and tribe
- Respect for elders
- Non-interference
- Orientation to present time
- Harmony with nature
- Respect for status of the woman and the child

#### **Common Beliefs Related to Spirituality**

- A belief in an unseen power, Great Mystery, or Creator
- All things in the universe are related.
- Worship reinforces bonds between the individual, family, and community (our relatedness).
- Spirituality is intimately connected to our health.

The core values of American Indian and Alaska Native communities are different from that of mainstream US society. Being aware of a few of these basic

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differences may help put a framework around a person's communication style that better fits with their belief system.

#### Traditional American Indian Alaska Native

- Cooperative
- Group/tribal emphasis
- Extended family important
- Modesty
- Patience/passive
- Generous/non-materialistic
- Respect for age
- Spirituality
- Indirect criticism
- Harmony with nature

#### Mainstream US Society

- Competitive
- Freedom, progress, efficiency
- Individualism
- Sexy
- Getting ahead in life
- Material comfort
- Youth envy
- External conformity
- Direct criticism
- Conquest Of nature

#### **American Indian and Alaska Native Culture and Communication Styles**

Communication depends on the spoken word, as well as body language, gestures, eye contact, and often touches. Below are a few differences between what you may have been taught and what American Indian and Alaska Native cultures perceive:

- Many of us are taught to use direct eye contact when speaking with other people. We are taught that direct eye contact conveys trust, honesty, and respect. However, some tribal cultures view direct eye contact with people other than family or trusted friends as disrespectful and invasive of their private thoughts.
- Personal space may also be another difference between you and people of other cultures. Everyone has their own idea of personal space. For some, this may be arm's length; for others, it may be more or less. In order to build successful and trusting relationships, it's important for you to understand the personal space required by another person.
- Touching is another form of communication. Some people are raised in cultures where touching – such as hugging or kissing – is a way of showing affection to family and friends. In other, more modest cultures, touching

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may only be appropriate for very close family. This may also be true of people who have come from an abusive background.

- People often use hand gestures when speaking. In many tribal cultures, few gestures are used. Those that are used are often only small gestures. Pointing is considered disrespectful by some tribal cultures. You may also expect someone to acknowledge that they understand you by nodding their head. However, head nodding is not a common practice in some tribal cultures.

### **Outreaching to or Educating American Indian and Alaska Native Communities**

An important aspect of the Circle Of Life initiative is to reach out and provide cancer education to American Indian and Alaska Native people. We know that some common outreach and education strategies that work in mainstream US society **do not work** in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. These include:

- Telephone/mail outreach from outside the tribe/community
- Using male outreach workers for women's events
- Voter registration or census lists to generate mailing/contact lists
- Using news stories or releases in general newspapers
- Using leaders to share the messages
- Partnering with a church to share education
- Using generic public service announcements or videos

As previously mentioned, it's important to listen and learn from the community. By letting the community tell you about their needs, they will learn to trust you. Remember, if the problem is within the community, then so are the solutions.

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#### **Appendix J: Linda B's Checklist: Factors Influencing Successful AIAN Community Education**

(Retrieved from Native American Cancer Research, September 21, 2009, at [http://www.natamcancer.org/handouts/Linda\\_B\\_Checklist\\_for\\_Successful\\_Community\\_Workshops\\_03-29-09b.pdf](http://www.natamcancer.org/handouts/Linda_B_Checklist_for_Successful_Community_Workshops_03-29-09b.pdf))

#### **Sessions and Workshop**

- Personal Storytelling – essential for AIAN learning (traditional way of learning)
  - Include *local* AIAN stories from community members.
  - When not available, use a nationally recognized AIAN leader instead.
  - Local stories help explain the relevance in a respectful way the community understands.
  - The stories increase the community members':
    - Readiness for learning
    - Long-term knowledge/retention
- One-on-one sharing with culturally specific videos, fliers, and brochures
  - Native-specific public service announcements/videos
  - Native-specific radio or TV news
  - Stories/Releases in tribal or urban newsletters or newspapers
- Education information so AIAN audience can make informed choices (“do not tell me what to do; let me decide”)
- Telephone calls or visits to remind someone about upcoming appointments (approximately 24 hours in advance)
- Native cancer survivors as role models, on staff, and/or as outreach workers
- “Gifting” and incentives for completing screening appointments or workshops educational activities should include healthy food.
- Use humor to lower their anxiety about a topic that carries a lot of emotional issues (e.g., respect for ceremonial use).
- Community programs, workshops, and presentations by local AIAN community members
- Set an objective for what the participants should be able to do by the end of the session.
- May or may not display the objective on the screen
  - It helps guide and focus the content and the participant interactivity.

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- The objective should be directly related to the take-home messages or behaviors.
- Include community participant interactivity at least every 10 minutes of the session.
  - At a minimum, include questions for participants to answer.
    - Questions should begin with an interrogative pronoun (who, what when where, how) but rarely, “why.”
    - Use open-ended questions; avoid questions with simple yes or no answers
  - Include some quick and easy interactivity within first five minutes of a community presentation to increase participants’ trust and feelings that it is OK to ask questions or to make comments.
- Include a clear take-home message for the community members during the session.

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<sup>i</sup> ( Espey DK, Jim MA, Cobb N, Bartholomew M, Becker T, Haverkamp D, Plescia M.(2014). Leading causes of death and all-cause mortality in American Indians and Alaska Natives. Am J Public Health.104 Suppl 3:S303-11)

<sup>ii</sup> (USCCR, 2004)

<sup>iii</sup> Office of Minority Health (2015). American Indian/Alaska Native. Retrieved 08 Oct. 2015 from <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=62>

<sup>iv</sup> (Espey 2008)

<sup>v</sup> (Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014) American Indian and Alaska Native populations. Retrieved October 7, 2015 from <http://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/populations/REMP/aian.html>)

<sup>vi</sup> (National Library of Medicine. (2015). *American Indian health*. Retrieved October 19, 2016 from <https://americanindianhealth.nlm.nih.gov/about.html>)