

Special Considerations for IECMH Consultants Working in Tribal Communities

Infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) consultants take a holistic, culturally sensitive, and collaborative approach to working with mothers in tribal communities who may be experiencing postpartum depression. They work with tribal leaders and community health providers to understand cultural differences in values and practices around mental health and maternal depression, learn how best to work with tribal members, and educate themselves on resources for referrals—including, when appropriate, traditional healers and practices. Tribal communities may have traditions and cultural practices that can support women struggling with maternal depression.

IECMH consultants working within tribal communities must also take into consideration environmental and systemic factors that could exacerbate maternal depression, including a lack of access to the following:

- ◆ Health care services and resources
- ◆ Basic utility infrastructure (e.g., water, electricity, roads)
- ◆ Community services (e.g., law enforcement, social services)
- ◆ Healthy foods

Being aware of inequities and lack of access to basic resources for families with young children allows IECMH consultants to assist early childhood professionals in advocating for referral resources. Consultants must meet families and early childhood professionals where they are, and must acknowledge the special circumstances affecting tribal communities.

As good listeners who emphasize respect and the importance of building relationships, consultants can support a universal, non-threatening approach to screening for postpartum depression. The IECMH approach of considering the strengths and needs of the client rather than fixing or imposing their own solutions fits well into the tribal community context. Considering the strengths, needs, and resiliency of clients also honors their traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

IECMH consultants who are not tribal community members can use opportunities for reflective supervision to learn about the tribal culture, explore their understanding of the historical trauma often experienced in tribal communities, consider the filters they may bring, and deal with feelings evoked in this multicultural work. Consultants who are tribal community members may also use reflective supervision to explore their own possible stories of historical trauma and decide how to best use their stories and tools of resiliency in their work as IECMH consultants.