

Suicide Prevention in Indian Country

The Tribal Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Center is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The Tribal TTA Center use a culturally relevant, holistic approach to deliver training and technical assistance on mental and substance use disorders, suicide prevention, and mental health promotion. TTA is offered to a **broad** audience of all tribal communities, a **focused** audience of SAMHSA tribal grantees, and an **intensive** audience of selected American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities per year. This fact sheet was developed for tribal audiences and the agencies that work with them.

Wellness Efforts in Indian Country

Resilience, empowerment, and hope fuel AI/AN communities to continue to overcome cultural suppression and historical trauma. Although continuing to face the challenges and risks rooted in poverty, repeated trauma, and lack of resources, today some tribal communities are leading the way in community-based wellness efforts.

The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

The 1999 Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Suicide introduced a blueprint for suicide prevention and guided the development of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.

The Strategy recommends four directions in supporting these conditions.

What works in Indian Country

1. Create supportive environments that promote healthy and empowered individuals, families, and communities.

To successfully create supportive environments in tribal communities, there should be a focus on empowerment, strengths, and the community's level of awareness of the issue and readiness for change. These efforts need to be on-going and collaborative while:

- supporting the local vision and solutions that come from the community;
- strengthening cultural beliefs and practices that provide a foundation for taking action, solving problems, and promoting lasting wellness; and
- promoting a sense of belonging and increasing protective factors, including strengthening cultural identities, the sense of family and community connectedness, and communication skills.

One way to create a local vision is to plan and host a Gathering of Native Americans/Gathering of Alaska Natives (GONA/GOAN) event. The GONA/GOAN facilitates the community's planning

Suicide prevention is a *health* issue that must be addressed at many levels by different groups working together in a coordinated and synergistic way. Federal, state, tribal, and local governments; health care systems, insurers, and clinicians; businesses; educational institutions; community-based organizations; and family members, friends, and others all have a role to play in suicide prevention.

*National Strategy for
Suicide Prevention*

process. Cultural activities that build supportive environments include drumming, dancing, sweat lodges, and sustainability, all of which provide opportunities for skill transfer from elders to youth.

Building supportive environments at schools has also been shown to increase protective factors by:

- implementing a life skills curriculum that includes problem-solving and positive thinking,
- instituting strong anti-bullying policies and practices, and
- implementing dating violence prevention programs.

2. Enhance clinical and community preventive services.

- Understand and acknowledge the impact and effects of historical trauma and poverty.
- Identify and draw upon protective and cultural resilience factors to help restore resilience.
- Routinely train substance and clinical service providers in suicide prevention.
- Train community prevention and clinical staff in evidenced-based interventions.
- Assure continuity of care during high risk transition times.

3. Promote the availability of timely treatment and support services.

- Address shame, stigma, taboo, and silence about mental and substance use disorders and suicide in ways that allow and encourage culturally appropriate conversations.
- Enhance the community's capacity through collaboration efforts and grant writing or administration training.
- Provide culturally-informed approaches in settings that are culturally congruent.
- Focus services on groups at increased risk of suicide, including AI/AN youth, suicide survivors, individuals who have attempted suicide, Two-spirited populations, and members of the armed forces and veterans.
- Address multi-jurisdictional issues through building collaboration and long-range planning.
- Provide and monitor post-intervention and aftercare

4. Improve suicide prevention data collection, research, and evaluation.

- To be effective, local evaluation capacity and infrastructure may have to be developed.
- Indigenous methodologies should be considered, such as practices based on knowledge creation, storytelling, and other indigenous ways of knowing.
- The complex issues of data collection, research, and evaluation are best addressed on a tribal level by tribal members where the issues of sovereignty, confidentiality, and culturally appropriate evaluation methods can be best navigated.

SAMHSA's Resources to Support These Efforts

Please check these webpages for resources to help in your suicide prevention efforts.

Tribal TTA Center webpage: <http://beta.samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac>

SAMHSA's webpage: <http://www.samhsa.gov/>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) webpage:
<http://www.samhsa.gov/>

