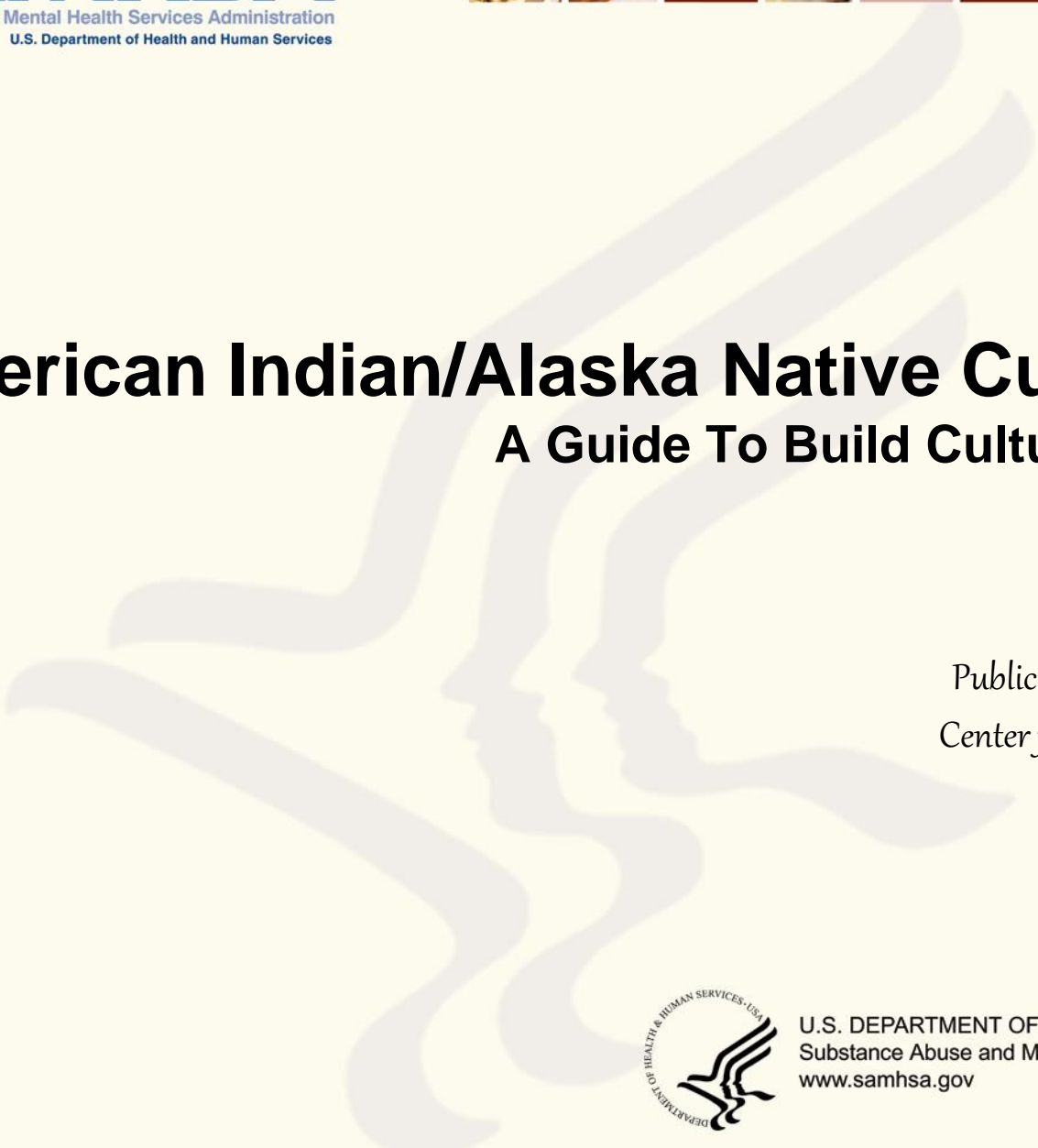


# American Indian/Alaska Native Culture Card

## A Guide To Build Cultural Awareness



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Center for Mental Health Services

April 23, 2014





## Culture Card – An idea is hatched...

- Concept was inspired by the *Iraq Culture Smart Card* developed by the Marine Corps Intelligence Agency for the military deploying to Iraq. I saw boxes of them at a National Guard Unit in Mississippi while I was deployed to Katrina in Sept. 2005 as part of a Mental Health Team.
- The basic idea was to develop something similar for non-Indian PHS Officers deployed to Indian Country for suicide clusters.
- I was reassigned to SAMHSA in May 2006 and presented the concept to staff and supervisors. My PHS Mental Health Team leader gave initial “go ahead” and SAMHSA leadership agreed to support the effort.
- In August of 2006 I assembled an ad hoc workgroup with PHS Officers, AI/AN behavioral health professionals and tribal community members who volunteered their time to develop content and review formatted material.



# AI/AN Culture Card - Core Workgroup

(2006-2008)

## Indian Community Members

- Shannon Crossbear (Lake Superior Ojibwa)
- Carol Iron Rope Herrera (Oglala Lakota)
- Terry Cross (Seneca)
- Vicky Oana (Chamorro)
- Constance James (Turtle Mountain Chippewa)

## Commissioned Corps

- CAPT Lemyra DeBruyn
  - CDC
- CDR Andrew Hunt (Lumbee)
  - SAMHSA
- CDR Laura Grogan
  - HRSA
- CDR Jean Plaschke (Lumbee)
  - SAMHSA
- CDR Stacey Williams
  - Walter Reed Behavioral Health Dept
- LCDR Betty Hastings
  - IHS



## AI/AN Culture Card - Behind the Scenes

- Many drafts and edits with input from a wide-variety of people familiar with work in Indian Country including the PHS American Indian/Alaska Native Commissioned Officers Advisory Committee
- Funding to design and print the initial run of Culture Card was identified through a sub-task of the CMHS Eliminating Mental Health Disparities Initiative at SAMSHA
- Initial printing of 2000 copies in January 2008. Within 2 months nearly all were distributed via word of mouth
- Second printing of 5000 copies was initiated in April 2008 with minor edits made after feedback from tribes at several SAMSHA consultation sessions. CDC, IHS, SAMHSA and HRSA combined resources for 50,000 copies
- In 2010 CDC provided additional funds for nearly 500,000 copies to be distributed by the SAMHSA Clearinghouse.



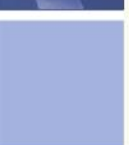
## The Final Product

- Nearly 300,000 copies have been distributed since 2008.
- An average of 4,111 copies are ordered each month, which does not include digital downloads of the pdf
- The Culture Card can be obtained for free through SAMHSA's Publication Clearinghouse.
- Order Publication No. **(SMA) 08-4354**:
  - By phone at 1-877-SAMHSA-7
  - Online at <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Culture-Card/SMA08-4354>



## Review of the Contents

- The Culture Card features content on 16 Topic Areas
- The remainder of the session will review highlights of the content in the Culture Card



# CultureCard

A Guide to Build  
Cultural Awareness

American Indian  
and Alaska Native

**Outside  
Front  
Cover**





## About this Guide

- ...provide basic information for federal disaster responders and other federal health providers who may be deployed or otherwise assigned to provide or coordinate services in AI/AN communities
- Intended to **serve as a general briefing to enhance cultural competence** while providing services to AI/AN communities. (cultural competence is defined as: the ability to function effectively in the context of cultural differences.) A more specific orientation or training should be provided by a member of the local community in any particular AI/AN community





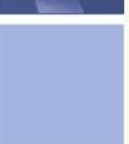
## Myths and Facts

- Several common myths are dispelled in the Culture Card, for example:
  - **Myth:** The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Indian Health Service (IHS) are the only agencies responsible for working with tribes.
  - **Fact:** The Constitution, Executive Orders, and Presidential Memos outline policy that ALL executive departments have the responsibility to consult with and respect tribal sovereignty.
  - **Myth:** Casinos have made AI/ANs rich
  - **Fact:** Out of more than 560 federally recognized tribes only 224 operate gaming facilities. About three-fourths of those tribes reinvest revenue in the community. In 2006, only 73 distributed direct payments to individual tribal members.



# Tribal Sovereignty

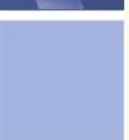
- **Presently there are over 560 federally recognized AI/AN tribes in the United States.** Over half of these are Alaska Native villages. Additionally, there are almost 245 non-federally recognized tribes. Many of those are recognized by their states and are seeking federal recognition.
- As sovereign nations, Tribal governments, have the right to hold elections, determine their own citizenship (enrollment), and to consult directly with the federal government on policy , regulations, legislation and funding.





## Regional and Cultural Differences

- Prior European contact, AI/AN communities resided throughout various areas of North America. Federal policies lead to voluntary and forced relocation from familiar territory to the current day reservation system.
- While there is great diversity across and within tribes, there are within-region similarities based on adaptation to ecology, climate and geography (including traditional foods), linguistic and cultural affiliations, and sharing of information for long periods of time.
- Urban Indian communities can be found in most metropolitan areas.





# Cultural Customs

- Cultural customs can be viewed as a particular group or individual's preferred way of meeting their basic human needs and conducting daily activities that is passed on through generations.
- **Specific cultural customs among AI/AN groups may vary significantly even within a single community.**
- **Respectful questions about cultural customs are generally welcomed, yet not always answered directly.**





# Spirituality

- A strong respect for spirituality, whether traditional (prior to European contact), Christian (resulting from European contact), or a combination of both, is common among all AI/AN communities and often forms a sense of group unity.
- **Many AI/AN communities have a strong church communities and organized religion that is integrated within their culture.**
- **Traditional spirituality and practices are integrated into AI/AN cultures and day-to-day living.**





# Communications Styles

- **AI/AN people communicate a great deal through nonverbal gestures.**
- **AI/AN people may say truths or difficult messages through humor, and might cover great pain with smiles or jokes.**
- **It is often considered unacceptable for an AI/AN person to criticize another directly.**
- **Getting messages across through telling a story (traditional teachings and personal stories) is very common...**



## Historic Distrust

- Establishing trust with members of an AI/AN community may be difficult. Many Tribal communities were destroyed due to the introduction of European infectious illnesses. Similarly, many treaties made by the U. S. government with Tribal nations were broken.
- ...government military-style boarding schools...
- The Federal “Termination Policy” in the 1950s and 1960s...
- The Federal “Relocation Policy” in the 1950s and 1960s...



## Cultural Identity

- When interacting with individuals who identify themselves as AI/AN, **it is important to understand that each person has experienced their cultural connection in a unique way.**
- The variation of cultural identity in AI/AN people can be viewed as a continuum...
- **Many AI/AN families are multicultural and adapt to their surrounding culture.**







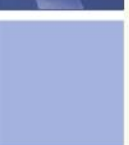
## Role of Veterans and Elders

- **Elders play a significant role in Tribal communities.**
- It is customary in many tribal communities to show respect by allowing elders to speak first...
- **In group settings people will often ask the elders permission to speak publicly, or will first defer to an elder to offer an answer.**
- Veterans are also given a special respect similar to elders...



## Strengths in AI/AN Communities

- Recognizing and identifying strengths in the community can provide insight for possible interventions.
- Extended family and kinship ties
- Long-term natural support systems
- Shared sense of collective community responsibility
- Retention and reclamation of traditional language and cultural practices





## Health and Wellness Challenges

- Many health and wellness issues are not unique to AI/AN communities, but are statistically higher than the general population. It is important to learn about the key health issues in a particular community.
- **Among most AI/AN communities, 50% or more of the population is under 21 years of age.**
- Prevention and intervention efforts must include supporting/enhancing strengths of the community resources as well as individual and family clinical interventions.



# Self Awareness and Etiquette

- Prior to making contact with a community, **examine your own belief system about AI/AN people related to social issues, such as mental health stigma, poverty, teen suicide and drug or alcohol use.**
- ...avoid making assumptions and be conscious that you are laying the groundwork for others to follow.
- Adapt your tone of voice, volume and speed of speech patterns...
- Preferred body language posture and concept of personal space depend on community norms...



## Etiquette – Do's

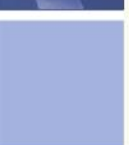
- Learn how the community refers to itself as a group of people (i.e. tribal name).
- Be honest and clear about your role and expectations and be willing to adapt to meet the needs of the community. Show respect by being open to other ways of thinking and behaving.
- Avoid jargon. An AI/AN community member may nod their head politely, but not understand what you are saying.





## Etiquette – Don'ts

- Do not interrupt during conversation or interject during pauses or long silences.
- Do not stand too close and/or talk too loud or fast.
- Be careful not to impose your personal values, morals, or beliefs.
- Do not touch sacred items, such as medicine bags, other ceremonial items, hair, jewelry and other personal or cultural things.





# Thank you

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