

# American indian health care issues

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American Indians and Alaska Native populations are faced with numerous health related problems and health disparities today. It is interesting because they are caught in kind of a limbo between the “ old ways” and the “ new ways”.

For the rest of the essay I am going to use the term “ Native American” rather than American Indian. It seems more appropriate in today’s culture. The Native American traditions of diagnosing and treating illness has not survived the migrations and new ways of life inflicted upon them. They have not passed along their culture to heal and therefore have come to rely on modern health practices. The trouble with that is that modern health facilities are not always available and they do not have a way to get health care.

At least one third of Native Americans exist in a state of poverty (p. 217). Since they are living in poverty, they are subject to the “ diseases of the poor” which include malnutrition, tuberculosis, and high maternal and infant death rates. And even when health care facilities are available, poverty and isolated living often keep them from being able to use those facilities. Additionally, suicide rates among Native Americans are more than three times that of the general population (Nieves, 2007, p. A-9).

With Native Americans not seeking modern treatment for mental illness, they tend to use traditional medicines and HEALERS such as a medicine man or woman. Divination, conjuring, stargazing, sweatlodges and herbs are used to treat mental symptoms. Alcoholism is a major mental health problem among Native Americans, along with “ ghost sickness” and pibloktoq.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome greatly affect Native Americans. They continue to have higher rates of alcohol use and drug use disorders than other racial groups. Alcoholism is the most widespread and severe problem in the Native American community. Alcohol abuse continues to rise and physical and mental problems related to alcohol use continue to rise.

Overall, there are many contributing factors that lend to the problems Native American have with obtaining health care. Domestic violence, urban problems, and health care provider services are among them. However, alcoholism is the greatest challenge Native Americans face. Hawk Littlejohn believes that once people return to a sense of identifications within themselves, they begin to rid themselves of this problem of alcoholism. (Littlejohn, 1979 Interview).