



2025 | CAPITOL INFORMATION & EDUCATION DAYS



Building Healthier Native American/Alaska Native Communities in California

California is home to a rich diversity of Native American tribes, each with its unique history, culture, and contributions to the state. In the face of ongoing challenges, Native American communities continue to demonstrate resilience, strength, and a deep commitment to preserving their traditions. By fostering collaboration, supporting health and wellness initiatives, and addressing community needs, we can build stronger, more vibrant Native American communities that contribute to a healthier California for all.

The Impacts of the Tobacco Industry in Tribal Communities:

- **Cessation:** Treatment options without alignment to the Indigenous worldview are seen as a significant barrier to AI/AN peoples' participation in substance use treatment. Research has demonstrated that AI/AN communities desire substance use treatments that include not only greater access to care, but also prefer services to have culturally grounded options, such as sweat lodges, drumming, and other traditional healing practices.¹
- **Use Rates Among Youth:** In 2024, 16.3% of American Indian middle and high school students reported current cigarette smoking, double the national average of 8.1% among middle and high school students.²
- **Accurate Data Collection Amongst AI/AN:** In order to develop effective policy responses to reduce marked health inequities among the AIAN population and other racial/ethnic groups, a comprehensive examination of health and socioeconomic challenges faced by the Native American population, including tribal communities, is urgently needed.³

Tribal communities are disproportionately impacted by tobacco:

- American Indians have the highest cigarette smoking rate compared to all other racial/ethnic groups in California.⁴



Native American Heritage Parade



2025 Youthquest

- Tobacco-related diseases like cardiovascular disease and lung cancer are the leading causes of death among American Indians/Alaska Natives.⁵
- Money spent treating commercial tobacco-related illnesses diverts financial resources away from essential needs such as education, substance use treatment, housing, and other services.⁶
- Commercial tobacco use has eroded sacred practices and community cohesion by replacing traditional tobacco in ceremonial use and uses appropriating symbols and Tribal imagery (e.g. Natural American Spirits brand depicts an Indian smoking a pipe).⁷
- Effective treatments for Substance Use Disorders (SUD) are essential to reducing health disparities and promoting health equity in Native communities; however, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people have been vastly underrepresented in SUD treatment research—due in part to a legacy of research ethics violations and misrepresentation that has fostered deep distrust toward researchers.¹

Tribal Community Projects are building capacity and developing leadership from within. Recent progress:

- Tribal youth are engaging leaders from Tribal council to the California State Legislature to advocate for the health of their communities and future.
- Tribes are developing smoke free policies in their places of business to protect their patrons and staff.
- Tribes have developed smoke-free housing policies and pledges that include single dwelling and multiunit homes, including common areas, balconies, and patios.
- Communities are developing interventions that incorporate traditional values and knowledge for their healing and protective properties.
- Tribes and Tribal-serving organizations have formed coalitions to educate and engage their youth through activities including, art contests, digital storytelling events, social media challenges, and community education events.

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