

Native American and Health Care

Description: For decades now, the Native Americans, along with Alaskan Natives, has faced constant neglect from Congress in their efforts to push through legislation that would significantly improve the healthcare of this particular ethno-racial group.

Keywords:

1. Native American
2. Alcoholism
3. National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)
4. U.S. Health Care
5. Fraudulent Practices

Brief:

The Native Americans have faced oppression in the eyes of this country for years due to the injustices passed down upon to them by our country's health care system. In today's society, the majority of Native Americans as well as Alaskan Natives now live on reservations in rural areas afforded to them by our government. The issue lies in the poor health care that is given to this particular ethnic group. For years now the health problems of this particular group has been ignored. Their health complications include alcoholism, diabetes, intergroup violence that has led to injuries, sexual abuse, tuberculosis, and they have also been plagued with a relatively high suicide rate. Sexual assault is especially prevalent in their culture, to the point that the United States Justice Department estimated that nearly one in three Native American women are raped during their lifetime. However, the saddest part of this all is that they also undergo more in terms of usual predictors of poor health such as a high unemployment rate, poverty, and a radical high school dropout rate. It has gotten to the point that Native Americans and Alaskan Natives die younger, on average, than any other ethnic group currently residing in the United States. In the words of Irene Vernon, a professor who specializes in Native American health at Colorado State University, "we are the sickest racial, ethnic population in the United States". There are several reasons for the decline in Native American's healthcare. The main reason for this injustice can be attributed to the fact that their rural based reservations are generally clinic based.



The nearest hospitals to these reservations are usually quite a drive away and when you take into account the aforementioned issues, such as poverty, you can understand why this isn't an option for all Native Americans. Their inability to afford their own medical treatment limits them greatly in terms of discourse in times of an emergency. It's the government's job to see that this particular ethnic group is taken care of to the fullest. Unfortunately, their efforts have been apparently abysmal. When questioned on this, Professor Irene Vernon was quoted as saying: "The money we get for health is less than the money given to prisoners...it's shamefully small, per person." Another serious problem that presents itself among this ethnic group is the issue of their increased suicide rate. In recent decades, suicide among Native American adolescents has sky rocketed to scary numbers. Young Native Americans are more likely to end their own lives than any other ethnic group in the US. Native American teens and young adults are committing suicide at a rate that triples those of their peers. The Alaskan Native Tribal Health Consortium found that native women living in Alaska were nearly nineteen times more likely to commit suicide than other women of their respective age. The combination of all of these problems that exist in Native American societies have been limiting their potential as an ethnic group for decades.



The mix of isolation, substance abuse, joblessness, and incarceration have plagued this ethnic group since the start of their government aided reservations. With all the prior information given, it's a mystery as to why these natives are receiving such poor treatment from our nation's government. If they're truly acting in the best interests of our nation's entirety, then why is it that this particular ethno-racial minority group has seen perpetual discrimination from the very governing entity that is supposed to be representing them? Documents such as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights are in place specifically to deter this exact discrimination from occurring. The answer sadly lies within the underfunding given to the very group that fights for these individuals. The Indian Health Service (IHS) has been underfunded by Congress for decades and it's clear from the elevated rates of disease among these individuals that it's time for the injustice to end. As demonstrated below in figure 2 from Skinner's journal, the funding is severely disproportionate:

Program Amount

Medicare spending per beneficiary \$12,042
National health spending per capita \$7,535
Veterans medical spending per patient \$6,980
Medicaid spending per enrollee \$6,206
FDI cost benchmark per enrollee \$4,817
IHS spending per user \$2,896
Other \$555

Although, there has been progress shown through the Affordable Healthcare Act passed in 2008 that has expanded a portion of coverage to this group. It's a small win, but the war isn't over.

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Pictures taken from:

https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/if_you_knew/images/eye_exam.jpg

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