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Race & Ethnicity in American Politics  
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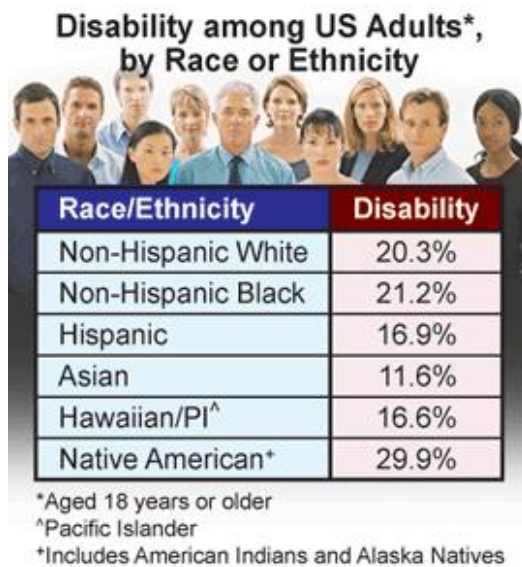
### **Native Americans with Disabilities**

**Keywords:** Disability, Native American (American Indian), alcoholism and alcohol related injuries, diabetes

**Description:** This issue brief reviews the most common disabilities among the Native Americans and American Indian population.

**Key Points:**

- According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) nearly 29.9% of Native Americans have a disability with the second largest group being Non-Hispanic Blacks at 21.2%.



[http://www.cdc.gov/features/dsdisabilityandhealthstatus/dsdisabilityandhealthstatus\\_b270px.jpg](http://www.cdc.gov/features/dsdisabilityandhealthstatus/dsdisabilityandhealthstatus_b270px.jpg)

- Physical, invisible, emotional and sensory disabilities appear most frequently throughout the Native American population, including Alaska Natives (AIAN). The most common disabilities in the continental United States are diabetes, emotional disabilities and learning disabilities. Among the Alaska Natives, emotional disabilities, learning disabilities and sensory disabilities, predominantly hearing and vision issues.
- Native Americans have the highest alcohol-related motor vehicle mortality rates among any racial/ethnic populations.

Images:

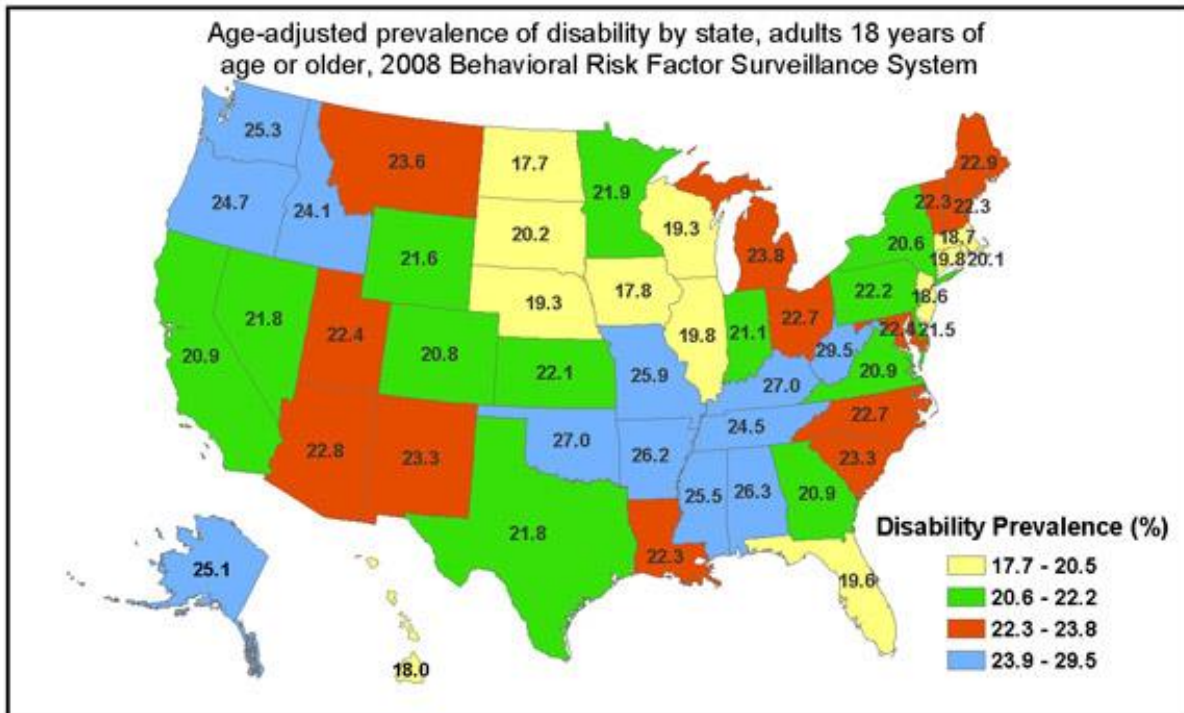
# HEALING CIRCLE



*Join our circle of healing  
to reduce and eliminate  
substance abuse among  
California Native Americans*

<http://www.adp.ca.gov/indian/substance.shtml>

*Look here at Alaska, the Pacific Northwest and Southwest states, which many Native American reservations are located.*



<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/data.html>

## **Issue Brief:**

In 1990, the United States government passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to protect citizens with disabilities with employment, public goods, and telecommunication accommodations. This act states that, "an individual with a disability is a person who has as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment" (eoc). However, the ADA is flawed in properly representing Native Americans on reservations and other parts of the United States because the ADA forces them to choose between the government of their tribal lands and the rights given to the rest of citizens in the United States. This conflict has created a dilemma for Native Americans and has not helped their already disability plagued communities.

With this said, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are approximately 2.5 million Americans who identify themselves as solely a Native American or Alaska Native and only 4.1 million who identify themselves as either Native American only or in combination with another race. Nearly 1 million of Native Americans live on reservations or on off-reservation trust lands. Some of the challenges that Native Americans with disabilities face is the rural geographical location of the reservations. According to the American Indian Disability Legislative Project (AIDLDP) survey, only two-thirds of the reservations schools, stores, churches, and other buildings were handicap accessible, proving to make life very difficult for the Native Americans with serious disabilities (NCD).

Often caused by the poverty of reservation life and the lack of resources due to rural locations, alcoholism and alcohol related disabilities are extremely common in the Native American community. For example in 1982 it was estimated that accidents on the road were 4.4 times more common among Native Americans than the rest of the US (Pichette). Furthermore, between 1982 to 2002 an estimated 65% of car accidents on Indian Reservations were alcohol-related compared to 47% nationally during the same time period (CDC). Most of these injuries, often followed by either temporary or permanent disabilities from the accidents include brain and bone damage. Also, in 1997, AIRRTC found that alcohol abuse was the most common cause of disability among Native Americans who are commonly associated with alcoholism (NCD).

Along with the physical disabilities mentioned above, the more prominent disabilities among Native Americans are not highly physical but often mental and/or emotional disabilities. For example diabetes, a invisible disability, is the most common disability amongst Native Americans and second is emotional disabilities, with learning disabilities in third (NCD). According to the American Diabetes Association (ADA) Native Americans have more than double the chance of developing diabetes than non-Hispanic whites in the United States. Moreover, Native Americans also have a very high sensory disability percentage. Work done at Northern Arizona University & University of Arizona in 1987 cited that hearing loss occurs four times more often among and vision impairment occurs 3 times more often among Native Americans compared to the rest of the US population.

Overall, Native Americans suffer from multiple kinds of disabilities at a far higher

rate than other ethnoracial groups. It does not look like many of these have a direct relation to others, with exception to possibly alcohol related car accidents impairing your senses. However, many of these issues have a direct correlation to living on rural, poor Native American reservations separated from the rest of general US population and lifestyle.

### **Works Cited**

Pichette, Eugene F.; Berven, Norman L.; Menz, Fredrick E.; La Fromboise, Teresa D. "Effects of Cultural Identification and Disability Status on Perceived Community Rehabilitation Needs of American Indians." Journal of Rehabilitation, Vol. 63 (October/December 1997) <http://www.questia.com/library/1G1-20209743/effects-of-cultural-identification-and-disability#articleDetails> Web. 14. Apr. 2013.

The National Council on Disability. "People with Disability on Tribal Lands." <http://www.ncd.gov/publications/2003/Aug2003> Web. 24. Feb. 2013

The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commision. "Facts About the Americans with Disabilities Act." <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/fs-ada.html> Web. 15 Apr. 2013.

### **Relevant Websites**

American Diabetes Association: <http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/complications/native-americans.html>

American Indian Disability Resources: <http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/culture/american-indian.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/dsDisabilityAndHealthStatus/>

National Council on Disability: <http://www.ncd.gov/>