What Providers Should Know About American Indian and Alaska Native Family Caregivers

There are 574 federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native tribes. Each tribe has their own nation within a larger nation, regardless of national and state borders.

- Tribal/Self Governance is essential to American Indian/Alaska Native culture. Tribal governments are responsible for a broad array of services, including:
  - Education
  - Law Enforcement
  - Judicial Systems
  - Healthcare

- Family is the center unit of American Indian/Alaska Native culture. Taking care of the family is part of traditional values, and Elders are highly regarded among family structures and in society (Scharlach et al., 2006; p. 139-140).

HEALTH DISPARITIES
- Diseases of the heart, cancer, and diabetes are leading causes of death for American Indian/Alaska Natives.
  - AI/AN are 2x as likely than whites to have diabetes (CDC, 2017)
  - Diabetes is a strong risk factor for heart disease—the leading cause of death
  - Common types of cancer include prostate, breast, lung, colon, and kidney

- Rural tribal communities are geographically isolated from care services and resources.
  - Exacerbates health disparities
  - Lack of caregiver training

CULTURAL COMMITMENT TO CARE
- Many American Indians and Alaska Natives express a distrust of the majority culture and government due to a history of poverty, displacement, and discrimination. As a result, caregivers are more reluctant to use formal supportive services (Scharlach et al., 2006).

- American Indians and Alaska Natives often feel a strong cultural commitment to caring and a reliance on family and tribe for support.
  - Healthcare services provided by tribal health providers
  - Community Health Representatives through Indian Health Services
  - Local tribal community-based organizations

- On average, AI/AN caregivers agree that cultural obligation is a reason they provide care.

OF AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE CAREGIVERS AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT CULTURAL COMMITMENT TO CAREGIVING WAS A REASON THAT THEY PROVIDED CARE TO A LOVED ONE.

DIVERSE ELDERS COALITION
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HOW CAN PROVIDERS BETTER SUPPORT AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE FAMILY CAREGIVERS?

- To provide for American Indian/Alaska Native caregivers it is necessary to be aware of their roots in social, historical, cultural, economic, and environmental issues
  - Strengthen tribal and community-based organizations to increase capacity of programming
  - “Shared” dedication rather than reinvent the wheel

- Build relationships with tribal communities in your region. This can include developing 1:1 relationships with tribal leaders, elders, Community Health Representative, and tribal members.

- Develop culturally and linguistically competent in-office material for training, information on caregiving, disease information, and intervention outreach
  - Avoid words such as “caregiver burden”
  - 6th grade reading level or lower
  - Use images with representation of American Indians/Alaska Natives

- Consult with local tribal leaders, elders, local institutions in local tribal communities in disseminating print material and to develop or increase capacity programming
  - Increased visibility of print material to reduce stigma, provide disease information, and caregiver training/information
  - Tribal leaders, elders are the centerpoint of tribal communities