

# Technical Assistance on Native American Culture: Improving WIPA Services for Native American SSA Beneficiaries with Disabilities

Issues Brief 1, Part I

January 2009

## Introducing the American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian population: Culturally distinct people living in WIPA project service areas

Work Incentives Planning, and Assistance projects across the country provide critical services to Social Security Administration (SSA) disability program beneficiaries by better enabling them to make informed choices about work. In the course of their work many WIPA project personnel will find themselves working with American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian (Native American) SSA beneficiaries with disabilities. *Technical Assistance on Native American Culture* Issue Briefs were designed to assist WIPA Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) to feel more comfortable and more effective when interacting and collaborating with Native people. *Part I* of this issues brief will introduce the American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian population. *Part II* will introduce the *Tribal Disability Actualization Process* (TDAP), *Disability Actualization Process* (DAP) and the *Talking Circle*.

### An Overview of the Native American Population

#### *American Indians and Alaska Natives*

American Indians are usually considered as people who have some Indian blood, are regarded as Indians by their community, and have ancestors who lived in America before the Europeans arrived. An Alaska Native is usually considered to be a member or descendant of Alaska's aboriginal peoples. Indian tribes and government agencies have different ways for determining who is a Tribal member.

- Most importantly, a person first identifies himself or herself as an American Indian or Alaska Native.
- Most Tribal governments generally use blood quantum; however, the degree of blood varies widely among tribes. For example, Navajo must be at least one-fourth, and Cherokee must have a Cherokee ancestor.
- Some American Indian people are members of tribes that are not presently recognized by the federal government. For example, the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana, whose Tribal Council is headquartered in Great Falls, Montana, is not yet federally recognized but is recognized by the State of Montana.
- The U.S. Department of Education's rule is a person must be registered by a Tribe.
- The U.S. Census Bureau uses self-identification without verification.
- The Bureau of Indian Affairs rule is that a person's Indian blood quantum must be at least one-fourth, and a person must be a member of a federally recognized Tribe.

The Census Bureau estimates there are 4.4 million American Indians and Alaska Natives, including those in combination with other races living in the United States. As of July 2004, more American

Indians and Alaska Natives lived in California (687,400) than any other state in the nation, followed by Oklahoma (398,200) and Arizona (322,200). In addition, about 1 in 5 Alaska citizens (19 percent) were American Indians and Alaska Natives.

American Indians and Alaska Natives speak more than 250 languages. Some live on rural or remote reservations, in villages and pueblos, and on rancherias and Tribal trust lands; but according to the Census 2000 the majority (66 percent) live in urban areas. There are 619 American Indian reservations and Alaska Native villages in the United States. Most reservations and Tribal villages are located in rural areas. For example, in southeast Montana, the closest “metropolitan” area to the Northern Cheyenne Reservation is more than 100 miles away. The largest reservation, the Navajo Nation overlaps parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. A map of Indian Reservations across the country is available at the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service website <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nagpra/DOCUMENTS/ResMAP.HTM>, or the Census Bureau website [http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/aian\\_wall\\_map/aian\\_wall\\_map.htm](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/aian_wall_map/aian_wall_map.htm).

Alaska is home to five distinct groups of Alaska Natives including the Northwest Coast Indians, Inupiaqs, Yupiks, Aleuts, and Athabascans. For a better idea about the remoteness of many villages in Alaska, consider that *Access Alaska*, a Center for Independent Living, has the largest service area in the country; approaching 440,000 square miles, including 100 Alaska Native bush villages with no road access. A map of Alaska Native Tribal Villages is available at the Environmental Protection Agency’s Region 10—Pacific Northwest website at <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/maplib/tribeak.gif>

There are now 562 Federally recognized tribes, each maintaining a government-to-government relationship with the United States. The topics of Tribal sovereignty and government-to-government relationships will be further discussed in other fact sheets or issues briefs.

### ***Native Hawaiians***

The original people of Hawaii may refer to themselves as the Kanaka Maoli. Native Hawaiians are descendants of the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands before the arrival of European explorers. While Native Hawaiians are indigenous peoples, they do not enjoy the same federal recognition as American Indian or Alaska Native tribes. A Hawaiian home land is a specific tract of land that has a legally defined boundary and is owned by the state. The state may lease these tracts of land to Native Hawaiians. Maps of the Department of Hawaiian Homelands Landholdings are available at the Department’s website at <http://www.hawaii.gov/dhhl/dhhlmaps.htm> .

The Census Bureau estimated in July 2004 that there are 959,603 Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders or Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander in combination with other races in this country. An estimated 495,000 people were identified as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Approximately 282,500 Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders live in Hawaii, which leads all states for this population. An estimated 20 percent of Hawaii’s population is made up of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific islanders.

### ***Disability and the American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian population***

Census 2000 reports a disability rate of 24.3 percent for American Indians and Alaska Natives ages five and over, and a 27 percent disability rate for American Indians and Alaska Natives of working age (16-64) in the civilian non-institutionalized population. Census 2000 also reports a disability rate of 19 percent for Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders alone ages five and over, and 21 percent for Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders of working age (16-64) in the civilian non-institutionalized population.

The *National Council on Disability* reports that the types of disabilities found in the general population can also be found in the American Indian and Alaska Native population. For many of these disabilities, such as disability related to diabetes and drug and alcohol abuse, the prevalence is higher. Many disabilities, such as emotional or mental health problems, learning disabilities, alcohol/drug dependence, or deafness are nearly or completely invisible. The *Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum* reports that heart disease is a major cause of disability for Native Hawaiians. This population also has increased incidents of disability due to stroke and other cerebrovascular conditions. Similar to American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians have high rates of obesity and extreme rates of diabetes. In addition, alcohol abuse is a major problem in the Native Hawaiian community.

#### **Internet Resources:**

More information about disability and the American Indian and Alaska Native population is available from:

- Research and Training Center on Rural Rehabilitation (RTC: Rural) at <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu>.

More information about disability and Native Hawaiians is available from:

- National Technical Assistance Center—Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (NTAC—AAPI) website at <http://www.ntac.hawaii.edu>.
- Rehabilitation and Research Training Center at the University of Hawaii at Manoa <http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu>.
- The Center for Disabilities Studies online journal *Review on Disability* at <http://www.rds.hawaii.edu>.

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***Introducing the American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian population:  
Culturally distinct people living in WIPA project service areas***

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