NUGHEJAGH

TO BECOME WHOLE

A Guide for Appreciating and Embracing Alaska Native Culture in Your Health Care Practice.

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Nughejagh

(New-Hah-Jaw)

- Means "to become whole, or to become healed" in Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina
- This phrase embodies the project's profound mission. Our goal is not just to improve but to transform the health and well-being of Indigenous people

Nughejagh
COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Working hand-in-hand towards a better tomorrow

Anchorage Museum

The Anchorage Museum has worked extensively to preserve Alaska Native history in a culturally humble and relevant manner. Their expertise in archival research and preservation of cultural items has allowed our team to gain a better understanding of traditional healing practices in Alaska.

Alaska Native Heritage Center

The Alaska Native Heritage Center has provided our team with critical input on Alaska Native cultural items and stories that have influenced our team's focus for our work on this and other projects.

Native Village of Eklutna

The Native Village of Eklutna is the only federally recognized tribe in the Municipality of Anchorage and has provided significant support to the Nughejagh project since its establishment.

The State of Alaska

The State of Alaska's Department of Health, Division of Public Health, Section of Women's, Children's, and Family Health has partnered with the Nughejagh project to make this resource possible.

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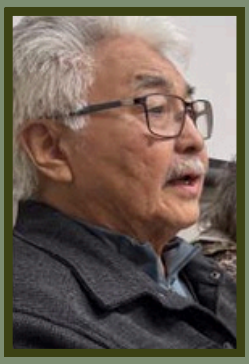
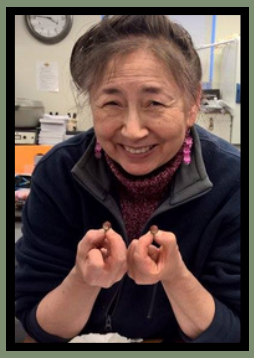
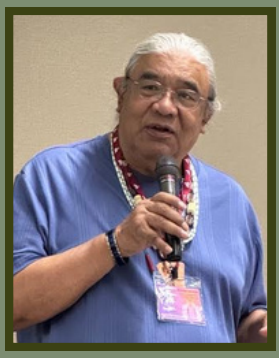
NUGHEJAGH
Elder Steering Council

All of the work for Nughejagh is overseen by our Alaska Native Elder Steering Council (ESC), which consists of nine elders from across Alaska. Our Elder Steering Council ensures that our work is community focused.





MEET OUR COUNCIL

Wilson Justin, Mary Jane Litchard, Amy Modig, Doug Modig, Lois Law, Eleanor Wilde, Donita Slawson, Marilyn Balluta, Panigkaq Agatha John-Shields

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To Become Whole

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Chin'an gheli
to
Qanchi Crafts
for original art for this project

Mahsi' Choo
to
The University of Alaska Fairbanks Library Archives
&
The Anchorage Museum
For contributions of materials for this project

Alaska Native Strengths

The following responses are from Nughejagh's Elders Steering Council when asked about Alaska Native Strengths:

We are all connected. We are patiently taught. - Mary Jane Litchard

Our strength is our profound connection to the elders, they are our heartbeat. - Amy Modig

Our community connection provides us with our sense of self worth. Our community teaches us and leads us to do our best. We recognize our individual gifts and help eachother reach our potential. It makes us believe in ourselves. We live in gratitude. Our ancestors are with us and hear us when we speak our language. We will be harmonious again. - Donita Slawson

We are kind hearted and love one another. We think with the heart, we are good people. What we share, we share from the heart. We are all connected. We have a spiritual connection with all Indigenious people. - Lois Law

Our connection to the land is our strength and our spirituality. Spirituality is a huge component of our worldview. - Doug Modig

Alaska Native

Shared Values

- **Show Respect to Others** - Each person has a special gift
- **Have Patience** - Some things cannot be rushed
- **Share what you have** - Giving makes you richer
- **Live Carefully** - What you do will come back to you
- **See Connections** - All things are related
- **Know Who You Are** - You are a reflection of your family
- **Take Care of Others** - You cannot live without them
- **Accept What Life Brings** - You cannot control many things
- **Honor Your Elders** - They show you the way in life

Alaska Native Values for Curriculum, Alaska Native Knowledge Network, https://www.uaf.edu/ankn

Alaska Native Healing

"Allow me to learn the ways of your book knowledge so I may combine it with my natural knowledge and lead the way."

Chief Dan George of the
Tsleil-Waututh First Nation

Alaska Native people are incredibly intuitive and observant, and thrive when engaged with professionals who take the time to listen to their concerns and who are willing to share the physiological workings of the human body in relation to health and disease.

As a healthcare professional, your goal is to not only provide scientifically proven treatments to help restore or maintain health, but you are also charged with the responsibility to teach your patients about their health and body.

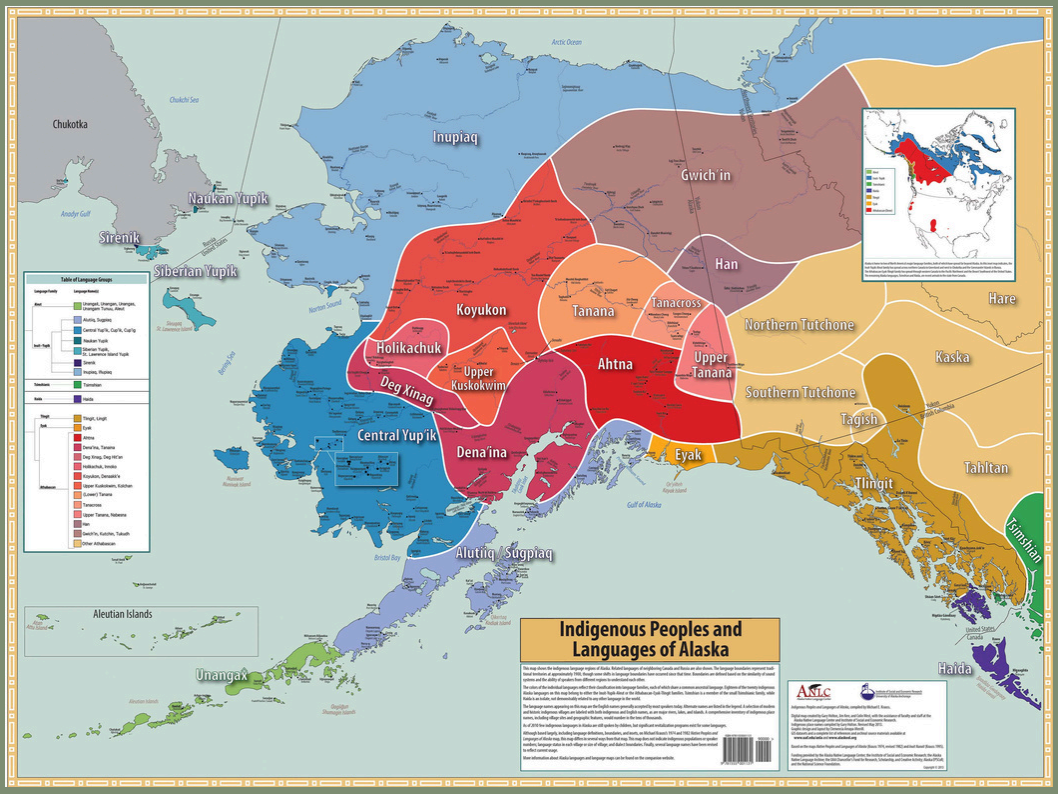
Alaska Natives have a great deal of awareness of balance and can thrive in a healthcare setting that supports education as much as medication.

As you prepare to serve the Indigenous populations of Alaska, prepare yourself to engage with a population who are accustomed to upholding a value system of respect and patience.

It is time to examine yourself and prepare to leave behind the norms of urban life as you enter into Alaska Native country.

Walking with dad by A. Firmin

CULTURAL AREAS
of Alaska



Map retrieved from the Alaska Native Language Center
You can find more information about Alaska Native Languages
by using the QR code provided:

OVERVIEW OF ALASKA NATIVE CULTURES

Alaska is massive in size with over 586,000 square miles and has five distinctive environments. Alaska is a subcontinent and is the largest state in the United States. Alaska has five geographic zones or regions: the Arctic (the upper one-third of Alaska which is part of the circumpolar north); the Interior (a vast region between the Brooks Range and the Alaska Range); Western Alaska (Nome to Dillingham, and the Yukon/Kuskokwim Delta); Southwestern Alaska (Kodiak, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Aleutian Islands); Southcentral Alaska (Gulf of Alaska, Kenai Peninsula, Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound); Southeast Alaska (aka the 'Panhandle', and the southernmost part of the state). Alaska has almost forty mountainous regions, including the 17 highest peaks in North America, and major river systems, such as the Yukon, Noatak, Tanana, and Kuskokwim.

The varied geography is matched by the community and linguistic differences of Alaska's first people, often called Alaska Natives. The Indigenous peoples adapted to the specific geographic area they inhabited, resulting in a multitude of unique social, hunting, gathering and fishing practices that reflect the type of environments they live in. The cultural practices vary greatly from region to region reflecting the important relationships to their respective lands.

Today, Alaska has over 227 villages. One could argue that there are 227 different cultural categories in Alaska, as each village reflects unique characteristics. In broader terms, one could easily identify eight broad cultural areas in Alaska which are the Iñupiaq peoples of the upper one-third of Alaska; the Yup'ik and Cup'ik peoples of the southwestern mainland; the Siberian Yupik people of St. Lawrence Island; the Unangax̂peoples of the Aleutian Islands; the Sugpiaq and Chugach peoples of Kodiak Island, the Alaska Peninsula and the Prince William sound areas; the Dene or Athabascans who occupy interior Alaska and the southcentral region; the Eyak who occupy the coastal between Prince William Sound and southeastern Alaska; and the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian of the southeast region.

OVERVIEW OF ALASKA NATIVE CULTURES

How long Indigenous people have lived in Alaska?

Archaeological records show that people have been in Alaska for at least 14,000 years. Ancient tools and spears dating back to 14,000 years were discovered in the Tanana valley of the interior.1 According to Alaska Native oral traditions the people have been here since 'time immemorial'. In contrast to the Beringian Land bridge theory, oral stories from many Alaska Native peoples link their origin to their land base. For example, the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian peoples have elaborate clan origin stories that trace their legendary histories and to an ancient time when people and animals could communicate and even inter marry. The Dena'ina people of the upper inlet area around present-day Anchorage have beautiful origin stories of their clans - how the ancestors of the present-day people were in the sky on a frozen cloud - and landed at locations such as Mt. Susitna.

IÑUPIAQ PEOPLES

(In-oo-pee-ack)

The Iñupiaq peoples of Alaska are part of the larger circumpolar Inuit population - the people that live in the circumpolar regions of Earth. The Inuit live in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, parts of Norway, Sweden, and Russia. The Inuit of Alaska are called Iñupiaq, and are well known for their unique adaptation to a region of extremes. One example of this are the extreme changes in daylight which range from no sunlight from late November to mid-January, then switches to constant light from mid-May to the 1st of August.

The Iñupiaq peoples of Alaska live in three regions - the North Slope region, the Kobuk region, and the Seward Peninsula. There are language dialect differences between these three regions. The North Slope region has eight villages that include Anaktuvuk Pass, Atqasuk, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Point Lay, Utqiaġvik (Barrow), and Wainwright. They all speak a related dialect of Iñupiaq and have a long history of shared cultural practices, exchange and partnerships. The Kobuk region which includes the Kobuk Valley and river is home to eleven villages including Kotzebue, Kivalina, and Deering, which are coastal villages, and Buckland, Noorvik, Kiana, Selawik, Ambler, Shungnak and Kobuk, which are interior villages close to rivers.

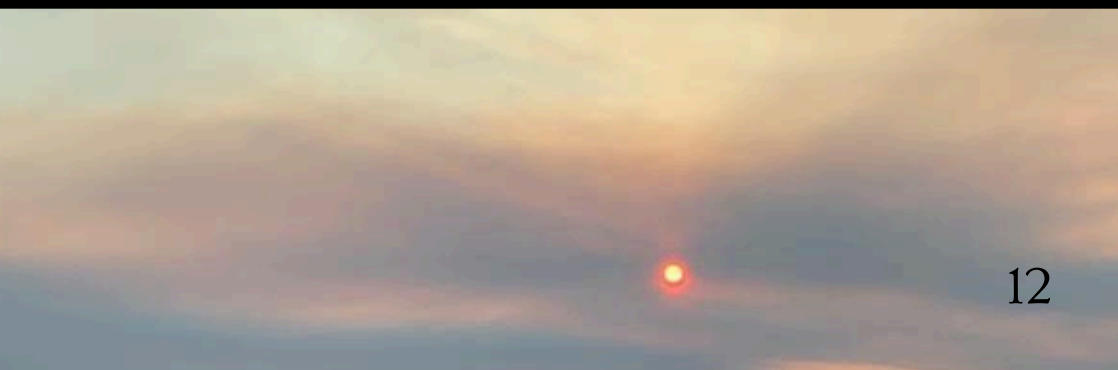
IÑUPIAQ PEOPLES

(In-oo-pee-ack)

The Iñupiaq dialect is the same in this region and they had a long history of exchange, partnerships and cultural gatherings, similar to the North Slope Iñupiaq. The Seward Peninsula is the most diverse region of the Iñupiaq in terms of language dialect, hunting and fishing, gathering practices, and material culture. The Seward Peninsula has coastal, island, and interior villages that include the Island communities of Little Diomede, Big Diomede (now part of Russia), King Island, and the coastal villages such as Nome, Shishmaref, Wales, Brevig Mission, Teller, Mary's Igloo, Solomon, Council, White Mountain, Golovin, Koyuk, Shaktoolik, Unalakleet, Stebbins, and St. Michael.

Most of Iñupiaq villages are coastal villages and the people are renowned hunters of marine mammals such as the bowhead and beluga whale, bearded, spotted and ring seal, walrus, and the thousands of migratory birds that come to the Arctic region every spring. The interior villages of Anaktuvuk Pass hunted caribou, which they often traded with their coastal partners. Today, the Iñupiaq people continue to hunt and fish as they have for thousands of years.

Almost all the Iñupiaq communities hunt walrus and seals. All parts of the animals were used - even the parts that could not be eaten. For example, the walrus tusks are used to make utensils, adornment and jewelry, the hides are used for the skin boats, the stomachs are cleaned and then dried, and are used for the heads of their frame drums. Walrus flippers are often used for the soles of the traditional footwear. Even though modern hunting tools such as rifles are used, the skin boat is still employed in Arctic marine mammal hunting techniques, as it is light in weight, and the men can carry the boat over ice. The people consider themselves spiritually connected to the beluga and bowhead whales they hunt and honor the spirit of the whales in a spring festival called Nalukataq in which dancing, singing and ritual butchering and sharing of the whale meat, which follows protocols that have been ongoing for over a millenia.



YUP'IK, CUP'IK

(you-pick, chew-pick)

The Yup'ik and Cup'ik Peoples live in the mainland part of southwestern Alaska, which includes what is commonly referred to as the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region - referring to two river systems that move through this region and then drain into the Bering Sea. Yup'ik peoples also live in the Bristol Bay region, and the eastern side of Lake Iliamna. The Cup'ik peoples live in Chevak, and they have a slightly different dialect, but it is mutually intelligible to Central Yup'ik. Other terms include Yupiaq and although Central Yup'ik is the common term for the language, Yugcestun is also used and is more of a traditional term. It is a language without references to biological sex, meaning there is no 'he' or 'she' and all names are also neutral regardless of sex. The people live in a high yield subsistence area and could support many villages and many people. For example, there are fifty-six villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta area!

The Yup'ik peoples, like all Alaska Native people, had deep spiritual ties to the lands they lived on and their traditional religious practices illustrated a profound expression of the spiritual power of all things. Like other Alaska Native people, all parts of the animals are used to show respect for the animal. For example, the seal intestines are cleaned, and dried outside, and then split into long strips. The strips are sewn together, using a water proof stitch and to make waterproof jackets for the kayaks. The seafaring peoples used kayaks for travel and also open skin boats

In the pre-contact era the Yup'ik villages always had one large central structure called the *Qasgiq* or men's community house. This large structure was the location for all traditional and ceremonial gatherings that included masked dancing. It also had a section of the floor that could be removed, so that a fire could be made for the community members to have saunas or steam baths. Interestingly enough, this was the main habitation for the men and boys and the non-male lived in their own homes in the village. The men would make their tools here as well.

Once Christian missionaries began arriving in the region in the late 19th century, they forced the people to abandon their Qasgiq and live in more western style houses where husbands and wives and children all lived together. The impact of Christian missionaries will be addressed later in this book.

SIBERIAN YUP'IK

St. Lawrence Island people, called Siberian Yupik are linguistically related to the Central Yup'ik, however their cultural, musical, and ceremonial practices are unique. They live on a treeless tundra island called Sivuqaq. In 1728, Bering under the flag of the Russian Empire saw Sivuqaq and re-named it St. Lawrence Island.2 The island is 100 miles long and 20 to 30 miles wide, and is located fifty miles from the Russian coastline, and have close ties to the Chukchi Siberians as they speak the same language and had trade, exchange and intermarriage with their coastal relatives.

The Siberian Yupik peoples are expert marine mammal hunters - harvesting whales and walrus, and also hunt many types of birds. Their traditional open skin boats called umiaks sometimes incorporated sails. In the pre-contact period they built large homes that used whale bone and driftwood for the house frames and walrus hide for the coverings; illustrating how they use all parts of the hunted animals. Their pre-contact hairstyles and body art were also unique and elaborate; they practiced tattooing and different types of body piercings such as ear lobes and facial labret piercing. These practices disappeared with the arrival of Christian missionaries who frowned upon body art.

EYAK

(Ee-yak)

Similarly to the Siberian Yupik people of St. Lawrence Island, the Eyak people represent a unique culture and language group. The Eyak peoples occupy the southern coastal areas between Prince William Sound and Southeastern Alaska. They had trade relationships, conflict, and territorial disputes with the Chugach, the Ahtna and the Tlingit. Their language is a distant relative to the Na-Dene language family, which linguists often call the 'Athabascan-Eyak-Tlingit' language family. Their material culture reflects their close relationships with the Southeastern Tlingit, the interior Ahtna Dene/Athabascans, and the Chugach of Prince William Sound. The last fluent speaker of the Eyak language died in 2008, however, there is a strong revitalization movement and the Eyak people are actively learning their ancestral language.

DENE

(den-aye)

Alaska has eleven different Na-Dene language families. Dene ('the people') is becoming more commonly used today, as the term 'Athabascan/Athabaskan/Athapaskan' is not self-designated and is an Anglicized term from the Woodland Cree language in Canada. The Athabascan or Na-Dene language family is the most prominent Indigenous language family in North America and is found in Canada, parts of the Northwest coast, and the southwestern United States.

The Dene peoples of Alaska occupy the entire interior region of the State and therefore occupy the greatest land mass. The Interior has major river systems and most of the villages are along the rivers which yields an abundance of salmon in the early summer to early fall, and the numerous lakes and ponds provide many other types of fish. The land bestows moose, caribou, and small game as well as berries and greens. The interior part of Alaska is subject to great temperature changes - in the summer it can be 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and in the heart of winter can be -70 degrees fahrenheit. The Dene adapted beautifully to the extreme temperature changes and uses the rivers as travel networks. In the summer they use boats, and in the winter when the river is frozen, they use their sleds and dogs.

The boreal forest is the world's largest terrestrial ecosystem and it rings the globe - going through interior Alaska, Canada, northern Europe and Russia. The Dene live in this incredibly lush and rich boreal forest that provides them with many resources. For example, the Birch trees have an outer layer of bark that is used by the Dene to make canoes, baskets, and even the coverings for their smoke houses. The smoke houses are used to process and dry their salmon in the summer months at their traditional summer fish camps. In the past the Dene would move through the seasons depending on what they were hunting or fishing or gathering. Many Dene people still practice this seasonal travel and will visit familial sites such as fish camps.

Due to the large area the Dene occupy, each group developed unique subsistence practices based on the environments they lived in. Each of these tribes had highly adaptive strategies that enabled them to survive for thousands of years. The traditional pre-contact societies also varied, but were egalitarian and most practiced clan-based kinship systems, and were often, but not always, matrilineal. Many Dene groups in Alaska, such as the Ahtna, still utilize and honor clan systems that have been in place for thousands of years.

TLINGIT, HAIDA, TSIMSHIAN

(cling-kit, hi-dah, sim-she-ahn)

The southeastern part of Alaska is the northernmost area of the Pacific northwest coast rainforest. The region is characterized by mountain ranges which capture the ocean moisture resulting in massive amounts of rain. Average rainfall in this region is over 200 inches per year.

This created lush forests and rich undergrowth. The salmon that spawn in the numerous streams and rivers provide a vital part of the diet, in addition to other resources from the sea such as halibut, seals, and the land provides deer, mountain goat, and smaller game. The fairly mild climate and abundant subsistence resources supports large populations.

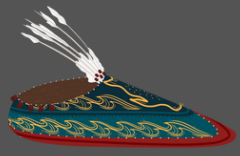
The Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian share and live in a lush coastal rainforest and share many cultural practices, such as elaborate carving designs often referred to as 'totem' poles, weaving, and lived in large wooden structures that housed many individuals that were related by their clan. All of their pre-contact societies were hierarchical clan-based systems that had rigid social protocols. Interestingly enough, the three languages are all unrelated. Tlingit, the northernmost residents speak a language that is distantly related to the Na-Dene language family; Haida is a linguistic isolate - not related to any other language in the world; Tsimshian or Smalgax is part of the Penutian language family. Although they speak different languages, the land and geography united them in similar material culture.

The Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian are matrilineal societies and the clan is inherited through the mother's line. Traditionally, in the pre-contact era, the peoples in this region lived in large clan houses in numerous settlements spread throughout southeastern Alaska and into parts of Canada.

The large trees were used to make canoes in which many people could travel and also fish. The clan houses, their clothing and regalia were all emblazoned with their clan and house crest(s). This is often compared to the coat-of-arms found in early European history, or the clan symbols found in other world cultures. Body art, such as face painting, was very common in the pre-contact period. The people were also protective of their territories and boys started training at a young age to become warriors to defend their villages.

UNANGAX̂

(uuh-nung-ah)



The Aleutian Islands are an archipelago - or chain of islands - that are over 1,200 miles. The Unangax̂ peoples, dubbed 'Al*ut' by the Russians, occupy this long stretch of islands. In the pre-contact era the Unangax̂had nine different subdivisions with some dialect differences. In the past, Unangax̂society was hierarchical, which is a stark contrast to the Iñupiaq, the Yup'ik, Cup'ik and St. Lawrence Island Yupik. Unangax̂society utilized a class system and also practiced slavery.
The Unangax̂ are true masters of their environment and are superb navigators and seafarers. The kayak as we know it today is based on the model found in this region.

The frames made of steamed wood with skin coverings (sewn with the waterproof stitch) are highly efficient in the water. The Unangax̂ people live in an area known for major storm systems, wind, and rain, and their navigation skills had to be perfected in order to travel and hunt. They are also marine mammal hunters and perfected the seal-gut parkas as these had to be worn in the kayaks to keep the traveler dry and to keep water from getting into the vessels. The north Pacific rarely freezes, so the people could fish year around, and gather a plethora of different types of shellfish, fish and larger mammals such as whales; the Unangax̂used an ingenious poison dart in their whale hunting tradition. The resources from the sea and land sustained a large population, and therefore considered a high yield subsistence area.

Dance, music and ceremony reflected the land they lived on and the sea. They also practiced elaborate body art, that included face painting, tattooing, pierced labrets and septums. Archaeological records indicate that the Unangax̂practiced mummification, and had advanced surgical techniques that included brain surgery.

The arrival of Russians in the mid-eighteenth century greatly impacted the Unangax̂. The arrival of the Russians forever changed many of their social and ceremonial practices and reduced their population due to wars, conflicts, and enslavement.

SUGPIAQ-ALUTIIQ

(soog-pee-ag ,ah-loo-tick)

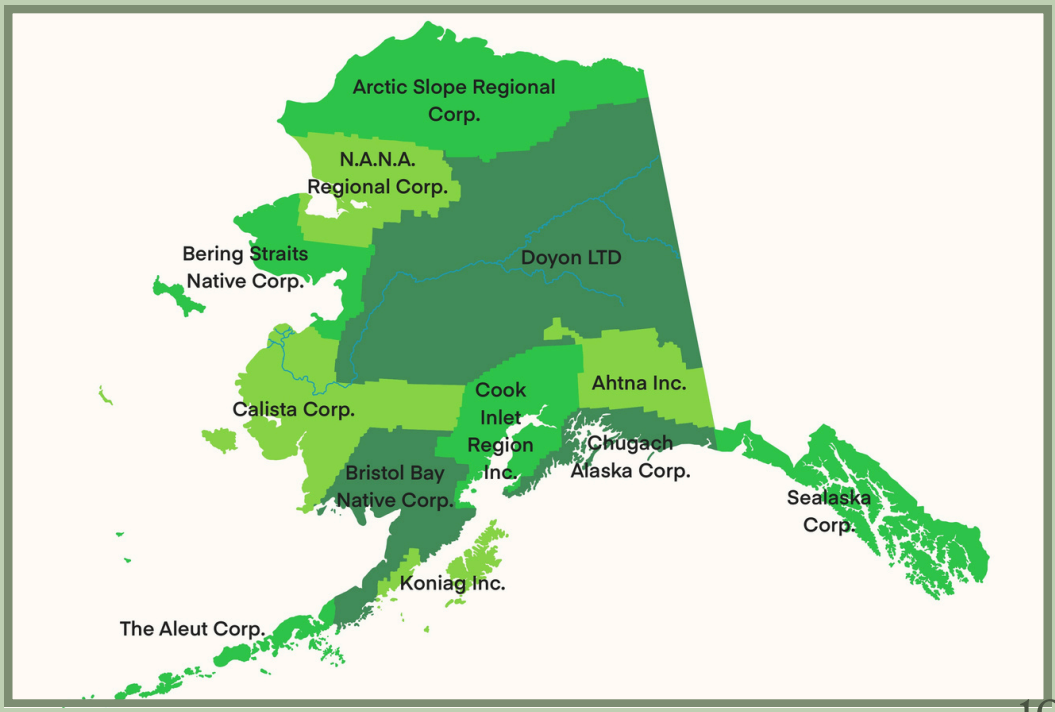
The Sugpiaq peoples live on Kodiak Island, the Alaska Peninsula and the Prince William Sound areas of southcentral Alaska. This region is a high yield subsistence area as well, and the people harvested marine mammals, fish, and many types of land animals, so the land supported large populations. Today there are seven villages on Kodiak, six in the Alaska Peninsula, and seven in the Prince William Sound area. In the pre-contact era the Indigenous peoples in this region had complex relationships that included conflicts, warfare, and trade. The Sugpiaq of the Prince William Sound area call themselves Chugachmiut, indicating their autonomy.

The Sugcestun language is linguistically related to Central Yup'ik. The Sugpiaq have cultural and social practices that are unique, including their music/dance and ceremonies. The Sugpiaq or Alutiiq had hierarchical social structures, and were expert seafarers who used kayaks as well as open skin boats called angyaks. Kodiak is the second largest Island in the United States (the big Island of Hawaii is the largest). The traditional house structures were large and housed a large number of related families. Similar to the pre-contact houses of the Aleutian Islands, the entrance was on the roof. The archaeological record on Kodiak is extensive and indicates that people have lived in this region for almost 7,000 years. Before the Russians arrived, there were numerous villages in this region. The ceremonies included masked dance practices and a rich music and dance tradition.

The Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act

The changes forced onto the traditional homelands of Alaska's Indigenous people and the establishment of the Tundra Times galvanized communities to become politically engaged and to create their own organizations. In 1966 17 of these associations met and formed the Alaska Federation of Natives to lobby congress for land claims. Congress worked with AFN leadership on several possible settlements, and what finally was signed into law in December 1971 included the following provisions:

- establishment of 12 Alaska Native Regional Corporations
- establishment of 187 village corporations that are linked to the 12 regional corporations
- land settlement of 44 million acres - about 10% of the land
- settlement of 962 million dollars for lands that the State and Federal governments would take
- Anyone born on or before December 17, 1971 would become a shareholder in one of the corporations - anyone born after would have no rights to become a shareholder
- The act did not protect subsistence hunting and fishing practices
- The Corporations had a twenty year timeline to establish themselves and generate profit, and then their shares and the companies could sell their shares - like regular corporations under the U.S. Security and Exchange Commission.
- The 12 corporations would have to share a percentage of their profits from oil, gas, timber and mining with the other regional corporations



Renaissance in Alaska Native Music, Dance and Language

In the 1980's Alaska Native people began to publicly celebrate their traditional dances. The shadow of oppression from the various churches and western schools started to lift, and this led to a renaissance and rebirth of traditional music/dance practices. This is evidenced by many large regional dance festivals.

Subsistence hunting and fishing practices are still contested. This has created many lawsuits and conflicts. The Katie Johns Case and the Venetie vs State of Alaska which went all the way to the Supreme court are just two examples.

Ida'ina Kaljeshna by A. Firmin

Quayana Night at AFN by A. Firmin

Renaissance in Alaska Native Body Art

There has been a recent reawakening of traditional Indigenous body markings (tattoos) and piercings, as Alaska Native people have been researching the cultural significance of markings of the body and face that would communicate with the world their clan or family, their role in their community, and any stories that they wish to remember.

Although much of the body art that is applied today may not represent exact traditional meanings (as communities today may not have or practice traditional roles), traditional markings play a significant part in the rejuvenation and celebration of Indigenous identity.

For example- some women who chose to apply traditional markings to their face have said they have chosen to do so as a way to reject Western standards of beauty and embrace a public display of pride for their Indigenous heritage.

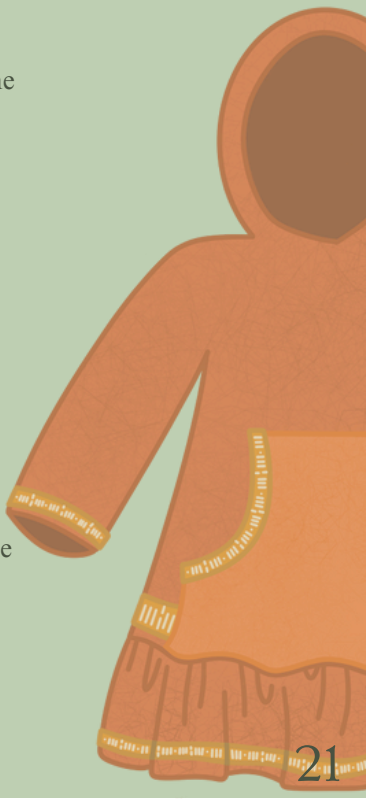
There are traditional body artists, who are considered traditional healers, trained in the counseling and symbolism of the markings of their ancestors. There are usually ceremonies and many conversations between the client and the artist before the application of markings occurs. The application of markings is considered sacred.

BROAD COMMONALITIES

Despite all of the innumerable variations of material items, music/dance practices, languages, and social structures there were, and still are, several shared practices among all the Indigenous peoples of Alaska. In the pre-contact period this included the important role of the shaman - a type of medicine person who could be a non-male or male. Some shamans were healers, others had great skill and magical abilities similar to Gandalf from Lord of the Rings, or Harry Potter, or even Eleven from Stranger Things. The most powerful shamans were highly respected and valued, and sometimes feared. They were integral to keeping the village safe - but because of their great powers they were intimidating. Once people from outside began arriving in Alaska, along with terrible epidemic diseases in the 18th and 19th centuries that the shaman could not prevent or treat, the shaman roles began to change and dissipate. Today, shamanism is no longer practiced.

Another commonality was the importance of music/dance practice in ceremonies and social celebrations. Most of the Alaska Native people traditionally used masked dancing in their most important ceremonies. Today, there are few ceremonies that survived the 19th century due changes made by outsiders and devastating population losses due to epidemic diseases.

The social values of all Alaska Native include high regard for the Elders of the community, and the gentle treatment of children, as well as the importance of community-based subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering are found in communities throughout Alaska, especially in the rural areas where subsistence practices exist. Alaska Native societies in the pre-contact era functioned as village-specific entities - meaning that each village had great autonomy with local leadership. The collectivist approach to sharing and working together still remains a vital aspect of contemporary life in the rural villages of Alaska. The subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering are almost always communal efforts in which extended family members use their expertise and work together. Examples include the traditional hunting of the bowhead and beluga whale in the far northern Iñupiaq communities; the movement of extended families to their summer fish camps; the gathering of berries and grass and other food and materials valuable to the community continuation and survival are all done in teams. Everybody supports everyone else.



TRADITIONAL HEALING

Healthcare has long been offered here in Alaska through the use of Indigenous Traditional Healing practices. These practices were passed down through oral teachings, observations, and hands-on practice.

Traditional healers were recognized as having special “gifts” and would often specialize in a certain practice of care that they would offer their fellow community members.

Many traditional healers were also believed to have the ability to communicate with the spirit realm, giving them the ability to advise community leaders, especially when critical decisions had to be made regarding health, marriages, treaties with other tribes, and war. Ultimately, the traditional healer was tasked with the responsibility to maintain a balance between the human and spiritual worlds.

The traditional healer has a deep understanding that the human body is complex, as it cannot be separated from the environment around us. This includes consideration of everything that we live with, including the animals, plants, water, wind, rocks, sun and stars. Everything the healer would do, from plant medicine prescription, to wound care, to ceremony was all done in a manner with the intention to connect with the life force of the entire universe.

Traditional healers throughout what is now referred to as North America have been experts in physical manipulation, plant medicine, and spiritual ceremony. Indigenous traditional healing practices have contributed greatly to conventional/modern medicine. Bone setting, surgical procedures, midwifery, massage therapy, and acupuncture are all examples of Indigenous traditional healing practices that have contributed to the development of conventional medical practices. Unfortunately, this history is seldom discussed, and the contributions of the Indigenous people’s healing practices to current practices are not as celebrated as they should be.

The introduction of Western ways has had drastic impacts on the health of Alaska Native people, as harmful policies, such as the outlawing of traditional healing and cultural practices and imposed policies that disrupted the community driving value system that had sustained respect and social structure within tribal communities for time immemorial occurred alongside with the introduction of new diseases which resulted in epidemics that in some cases wiped out entire Alaska Native communities.

TRADITIONAL HEALING

Despite all of the efforts to eradicate traditional approaches to health and well-being, Indigenous traditional healing practices continue. Oral traditions and the teaching of healing were carefully passed down, typically in secret, even as government policies shifted, making it legal to practice healing openly. The appropriation of sacred practices has become another concern for healers, as spiritual outsiders have adopted traditional healing practices and attempted to profit from ceremonies and plant medicines, often with little regard for maintaining the spiritual and physical balance of living and non-living things. There is a saying among tribal communities that if someone claims to be a healer and charges you money for their services, they are not legitimate. The traditional practice of healing was never intended to make someone wealthy in the monetary sense. The fear of appropriation or misuse of traditional healing is one obstacle that Indigenous communities face as they navigate ways to improve and create more community focused health programs for their people. Nevertheless, there is a growing desire for communities to return to traditional ways of healing, as they offer a more holistic approach to health.

This includes the reintegration of Indigenous traditional healing practices in hospital settings.

The Significance of the Bear

"The medicine man has a special relationship with the bear. Because to be a healer means you have to face your biggest fear. For a Dene, what we tend to fear the most is the grizzly bear. So in order to prepare yourself to be a healer, you must go out on your own and face the grizzly. You must face your fear. Once you do, and realize that you can live and continue despite that fear, you will no longer allow fear to control you.
You will be ready to help others face their fears."
-Ahtna Elder Wilson Justin

THE ALASKA NATIVE HEALTH SYSTEM

The Indian Health Service:

The history of healthcare for Alaska Natives and American Indians is essential for a healthcare professional who works with and in Indigenous communities to understand. This section of the guide will cover the complex structure of Alaska Native Healthcare systems and how these systems evolved.

The Indian Health Service (IHS) is the primary health care program serving the Indigenous populations of the United States and was founded in 1955. Before this, the healthcare of Alaska Natives and American Indians was first delivered by the U.S. War Department in the 1800s, followed by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1849, and lastly by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1955.

The IHS has three branches:
1.) The Federally Operated Direct Healthcare Services
2.) Tribally Operated Healthcare Services
3.) Urban Native American Healthcare Systems and Resource Centers

Alaska Tribal Health Organizations:

In recent years, tribal governance in the United States has gained recognition, particularly in the management of health services. This means that tribal governments can choose to utilize IHS directly, or assume responsibility for healthcare and contract with the IHS, or to establish their own programs with supplementation provided through the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act (ISDEAA). Currently, more than half of the IHS appropriation is administered by tribes.

While tribal management of Indigenous healthcare delivery became increasingly utilized, Alaska has had to be exceptionally innovative in its approach to ensuring Alaska Natives would receive efficient and effective care. Alaska has 229 federally recognized tribes that reside in communities spanning approximately 586,412 square miles. Many of these communities are not accessible by roadway systems.

In 1994, the Alaska Tribal Health Compact was formed. The Compact provides the terms and conditions for the government-to-government relationship between the tribes and the U.S. Government through the IHS.

The compact ensures that healthcare delivery in Alaska can take place through three main avenues:
1.) Village Clinics (community services)
2.) Regional Hub Cinics (regional services)
3.) Alaska Native Medical Center (State services)

There are numerous tribal health boards that oversee each level of service (community, regional, and State).

HEALING - CENTERED HEALTH CARE

Understanding Alaska Native History:

As healthcare professionals, you cannot appreciate and attempt to apply Alaska Native cultural strengths in your practice without also understanding Alaska Native history. This history, as with many other demographics, includes a history of trauma. Therefore, to effectively apply cultural strengths in your practice, you must also strive to be trauma-informed.

Trauma continues to contribute to social, mental, and physical imbalance. Alaska Native people have endured enslavement, relocation, deadly epidemics, and cultural genocide. Many traumas that Alaska Native people have endured are not discussed at home or taught about in schools. This lack of disclosure and recognition of trauma has resulted in further breakdown of health and community.

Implications of Historical Trauma in Establishing Trust:

Unfortunately, because there have been multiple instances where Alaska Native people have been traumatized by medical professionals, there is now a hesitancy to trust healthcare professionals today. Even if an individual themselves has not had the trauma occur to them directly, they may have a close family member or loved one who has experienced trauma in a medical facility and therefore will carry with them fear of going to the hospital or to routine appointments because of stories they have heard of people that they love and trust being hurt at medical facilities.
Establishing trust with your Alaska Native patients will be a critical step in ensuring that the care you provide is effective.

Unresolved trauma is known to contribute to an increase in health risk behaviors as an attempt to self-medicate or escape unexplainable pain.
Some health risk behaviors may look like:

- Commercial tobacco use (not ceremonial tobacco)
- An increase in Sexual behaviors resulting in increased Sexually Transmitted Infection exposure
- Increase use of Alcohol and Injectable drugs
- Increase thoughts of Suicide or Suicide attempts

- (Kelliher, 2023)

HEALING - CENTERED HEALTH CARE

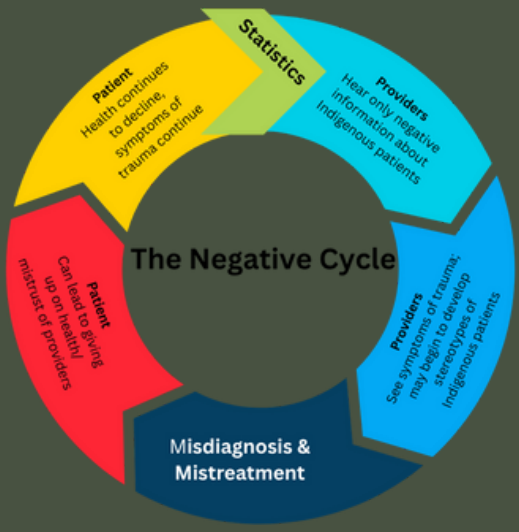
Instead of asking "What is wrong with you" ask "What happened to you" or "How are you doing?"

Healthcare Provider Perspective:

All healthcare professionals can become too fixed on their personal worldviews, which can lead to misunderstanding with patients who have contrasting worldviews. This rigid fixation can emerge over the life course through the experiences we have. If left unrecognized and unattended, such rigidity in thinking can become an issue when it affects how we approach people who fit counterproductive generalizations. When left unattended, such fixations can serve as a reason for denying or rationing care or even for using procedures that can cause considerable pain or even injury.

There is now a call to use self-assessment, training, and continuing education to help providers become more self-aware (Ludwig et al., 2019). Discussing personal experiences and worldview in practice is critical to broadening the understanding of future health professionals. Professional education and data can also reinforce perceptions of populations, leading to assumptions that some groups have increased risk of diseases/ conditions.

This exposure to negative statistical data can lead to what is referred to as the "Negative Cycle," in which practitioners embrace negative views derived from statistical data, amplifying the flaws of particular groups. This negative approach can shape and reinforce practitioners' low expectations of patients and prevent the formation of trust between the provider and patient, leading to misdiagnosis and mistreatment. It can also lead to criticism of patients by otherwise well-meaning professionals. Future practitioners can benefit from instruction about how to break this negative cycle so they can offer care within a setting of trust, mutual confidence, and a patient's commitment to follow through.



Integrating Indigenous Traditional Healing in Healthcare

One area of strength that is being recognized and reintroduced is that of Indigenous traditional healing knowledge.

The evidence of the effectiveness of Indigenous traditional healing knowledge is presented in the fact that not only have Indigenous people thrived for thousands of years before contact with Europeans, but we have continued to survive despite the efforts to eradicate our existence and culture.

The model of care that many of the IHS facilities utilize is that of a Western or what is often referred to as a conventional medical approach. The lack of community focused approach, coupled with being severely underfunded, has resulted in subpar and ineffective treatment of Indigenous people. This is evident through the staggering statistics that indicate the continued decline in health among American Indians and Alaska Natives. As it stands, unfortunately, Indigenous people in the United States are increasingly becoming less healthy.

Instances where THPs have been reintegrated back into the healthcare system have resulted in “greater mental well-being,” with many people in those organizations emphasizing its many advantages as “Indigenous Peoples’ wholistic worldview, on the other hand, focuses on the concept of "wellbeing," which contends that the social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual aspects of an individual's health must be addressed within the healthcare delivery system”(Asamoah, Khakpour, Carr, Groot, 2023).

There is a great desire among many Alaska Native people to return to regular engagement and practice of traditional healing The practice of traditions not only help to improve the state of the body, but also considers the health of the mind, spirit and environment.

Additionally, there is firm belief in Alaska Native communities that cultural traditions contribute to our healing.
As a healthcare provider who will be providing services in Alaska Native communities, it is crucial for you to understand the significance of traditional healing among the patients you are treating, as you should actively work on ways to provide conventional care that will complement any traditional healing measures your patient is taking.

The two approaches to care do not have to contrast each other. They can work together in creating a holistic approach to finding health and well-being for your patients.

APPRECIATING ALASKA NATIVE STRENGTHS IN HEALTHCARE IS HEALING

Applying Cultural Strengths in Health Care:

Why is it necessary to learn how to appreciate and apply Indigenous Cultural Strengths in Healthcare when working with Alaska Native communities?

Because Alaska Native culture is multifaceted, with rich traditions that have not only sustained Alaska Native people throughout the thousands of years they have lived on these lands, but also helped them thrive despite the past suffering they have endured.

It is also important to understand that applying the Indigenous Perspective in your healthcare practice is essential because Indigenous representation in the medical field remains low. Approximately 0.3% of medical providers are American Indian/Alaska Native (ADEA, 2023). This means that the likelihood of an Alaska Native patient receiving care from a fellow Indigenous person is unlikely. Until the representation of Indigenous people in medical professions increases, the next best step is to ensure that healthcare professionals understand how vital Alaska Native culture is to the patients and communities they will be serving.

Appreciating and applying the Indigenous perspective in your practice can help you:

·Build trust and rapport with your patient
·Help you understand where your patient is coming from
·Give you tools/strengths to draw from when investigating a concern and developing a treatment plan
·Ensure better communication with your patient and patient understanding of recommendations and treatment plans
·Increase patient compliance with recommendations and treatment

Valuing Alaska Native Identity:

When you draw on your patient's cultural strengths in your healthcare practice, you recognize the importance of their cultural background. This recognition is critical as many Indigenous patients have had to feel they have had to set aside their culture in specific environments (in school and during medical appointments). Recognizing that Alaska Native culture is important is to acknowledge that your patient is also important. It sends the message to your patient that you see them for who they are and recognize their strength, intelligence, and capacity to contribute to their healing journey through the use of their cultural values and traditions.

Building Trust and Rapport with your Patient:

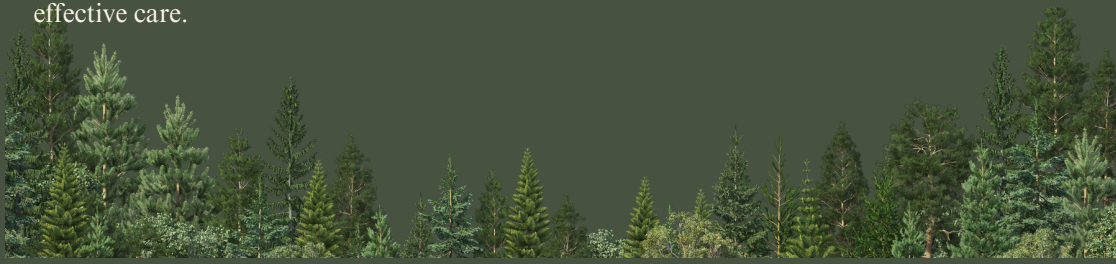
Throughout history, Alaska Native people have been subjected to harmful policies that were carried out in healthcare settings by healthcare professionals. This history has led to the development of mistrust of professionals, especially if the provider is non-Native and does not seem to understand the culture of the patient.

This is your opportunity to learn about the people you will be serving, so that you can prepare yourself to effectively utilize Alaska Native values and traditions in your conversations with patients and their families.

Approaching the community with humility and eagerness to listen and learn from them will help you understand their distinct culture and prepare you to serve your patients in a manner that will help establish a relationship and trust.

Stay Humble and Live in Reciprocity:

Keep in mind that while you are entering an Alaska Native Community, you bring with you knowledge that will be helpful for the community you are serving; however, be aware that the Indigenous patients you are serving are incredibly intelligent. We encourage you to take your time in this beautiful place as an opportunity not only to give of yourself and share the knowledge you bring, but also to be receptive to learning from your patients. Living in humility and reciprocity is key to offering effective care.



Ten Principles of Alaska Native Strength Based Healthcare:

- Reflect on your own worldview and work to ensure it does not interfere with your healing work
- Make time to get to know your patient's culture and history
- Strive to learn your patient's language
- Explore the land and oral traditions of the land you are visiting
- Listen carefully to your patient, and give them plenty of time to respond to your questions and/or statements
- Take the time to explain your patient's diagnosis and treatment options
- Remember Alaska Natives patients have not always experienced healing care at the hands of medical professionals, and may be hesitant to trust
- Respect your patient's autonomy
- Respect traditional healing practices your patient may utilize and look for ways to complement traditional care with modern medicine.
- Look for intersectionality between your patient's culture and your own

Communication Do's

The following are some tips for language usage and personal conduct in your healthcare practice. Please note that some Alaska Native people may refer to themselves using terms listed on this page. Some Alaska Native people do not have a problem with the words listed on this page, while others take issue with them. Some Alaska Native people are only okay when other Alaska Native people use the terms listed on this page. It varies from person to person. That is why it is always best to proceed with caution by avoiding the words mentioned in this list. It is of the utmost importance to pay attention to what people in a community refer to themselves as.

- Do give your patients space to talk. Patients may need extra time to formulate their responses. Embrace the silence.
- Do pay attention to nonverbal language. For some, raised eyebrows may indicate "yes" while a scrunched face indicates "no". If you are ever unsure about nonverbal communication, then just ask!
- Do respect the amount of eye contact that your patients give you. If you are unsure of where to look besides the eyes, then you could lower your gaze to the ground.
- Do be a good listener. Not just to your patients, but also observe and listen to your surroundings. Take note of the tone of voice being used, the pace of speech, the way others interact with each other.
- Do admit when you do not know something about Alaska Native culture and invite others to educate you about topics regarding their communities and cultures.

And Dont's

- Don't correct the way an Alaska Native person refers to themselves.
- Don't use the term Al*ut, instead refer to the specific cultural group such as Unangan, Sugpiaq, or Alutiiq.
- Don't use the term Esk*mo; instead, refer to the specific Alaska Native community that you are referring to, such as Yup'ik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, Inupiaq, or Cup'ik.
- Don't use the term Indian, instead use the term Dene or Athabascan to refer to the Alaska Native peoples of Interior Alaska. To some, the term Athabascan may be seen as a pejorative, but it is still widely used and accepted in Alaska.
- Don't assume that no eye contact equates to not listening or lying. Respectful eye contact practices vary across cultures. In many Alaska Native cultures, lowering one's gaze indicates respect, while extended eye contact indicates the opposite.
- Don't interrupt when someone is speaking, especially if the person is an elder. Talking over someone can be seen as disrespectful and rude.

CONCLUSION

We hope this resource better prepares you to work with Alaska Native people by learning more about their communities, values, strengths, and traditional healing. We hope you will use this information to ask your patients questions that allow them to tell you about their experiences and community, and which help you create care plans together.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Interactive Digital Map of Indian Boarding schools from the National Native American Boaridng School Healing Coalition

Alaska Native Heritage Center

The Anchorage Museum

University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives

Epidemics in Alaska

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