

2023 VA Permanent Housing Conference

American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans: Special Considerations and Opportunities

Who is in the room?

- **SSVF Staff**
- **HUD-VASH Staff**
- **VA leadership**

American Indian and Alaska Native Populations

- American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) peoples have rich diversity in their tribal affiliations, cultural customs and languages.
- As of 2022, there are 574 Federally recognized AI/AN Nations (including tribes, bands, pueblos, native villages, nations and communities) in the United States, and as many as 400 non-Federally recognized tribes.
- According to the 2020 Census, 9.7 million AI/AN people live in the U.S. and its territories. About 334,000 U.S. Veterans identify as AI/AN alone or in combination with other races.
- In AI/AN communities, Veterans are often given special respect similar to that of elders for having accepted the role of protector and experienced personal sacrifice.
- When serving the AI/AN homeless population, culturally competent caseworkers need to have a strong knowledge of the history, beliefs, customs, and traditional care preferences of the population served.

Military Statistics

- American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) serve in the U.S. Armed Services at a higher rate than any other group.
- Roughly 33% of AI/AN Veterans using VA care access VA mental health services.
- 74.3% of AI/AN who are service-connected utilize VA health care.
- [“Why we Serve”](#)



Oklahoma City Inter-Tribal Stand Down

Native American Veterans Homelessness Initiative

- The White House Council on Native American Affairs identified homelessness as an important social determinant of health.
- Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Homeless Programs Office (HPO), in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Indian Health Services (IHS), developed an initiative to support education and access to the VHA HPO services and resources to assist American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans who are experiencing homelessness.
- From this, VHA HPO identified a deliverable to reach out to Urban Indian Organizations (UIO) to inform them of the programs and services VHA offers and develop partnerships to ensure AI/AN Veterans experiencing homelessness have an easy access path to obtain local HPO services.
- By developing mutually beneficial relationships, we hope to specifically provide services to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) undergoing homelessness/houselessness in their communities.

First Five Sites Identified for Initial Implementation of Outreach

Location	Veteran Affairs Health Care System	Indian Health Service	Urban Indian Organization Alaska Representative
Seattle	VA Puget Sound	Portland Area	Seattle Indian Health Board
Albuquerque	VA New Mexico	Albuquerque Area	First Nations Community Health Source
Phoenix	VA Phoenix	Phoenix Area	Native Health- Central Native American Connections
Los Angeles	VA Greater Los Angeles	California Area	United American Indian Involvement, Inc
Alaska	VA Alaska	Alaska Area	Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium Alaska Area Representatives

Veteran Affairs Efforts in Outreach in Serving AI/AN Veterans

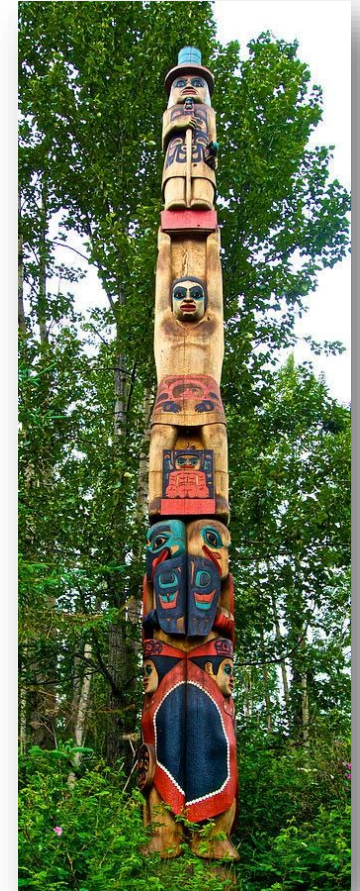
- VA is working to make resources better known and accessible to AI/AN Veterans.
- Developed an AI/AN specific HPO Brochure: [Resources for Native American Veterans Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- With Indian Health Service's geographer, developed a map that overlays UIOs locations with VHA facilities and included directions to each location: [Find Health Care and Resources for Native American Veterans \(arcgis.com\)](#)
- HPO developed Stand Down presentation material to educate UIO's and other appropriate stakeholders about the role of community involvement in developing Stand Down.
- Copay exemptions for AI/AN Veterans



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Tribal HUD-VASH

- **Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)**
 - Tribal HUD-VASH is a demonstration program in place since 2016 based on the original HUD-VASH program.
 - Offers permanent supportive housing to American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans.
 - HUD’s Office of Native American Programs (ONAP) provides **hybrid Indian Housing Block Grants (IHBG) to participating tribes for rental assistance** instead of the HUD-VASH voucher provided by HUD’s Housing Choice (Section 8) voucher program.



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Tribal HUD-VASH (cont.)

- **Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)**
 - Currently limited to 29 tribes and their VA partners as determined by the HUD-awarded grants for rental assistance.
 - The tribe or tribal housing authority provides the rental assistance.
 - The VA provides case management and supportive services to support Veterans and their households with housing stability.

29 Tribal Grantees and Their VA Partners (not SSVF)

Tribe	Parent VA MC/HCS
All Village Council Presidents	Alaska VA HCS (Anchorage)
Cook Inlet	Alaska VA HCS (Anchorage)
Tlingit and Haida	Alaska VA HCS (Anchorage)
Tohono O'odham	Southern AZ VA HCS
San Carlos Apache	Phoenix VAMC
White Mountain Apache	Phoenix VAMC
Hopi	Northern AZ VA HCS
Navajo	Northern AZ VA HCS
Fort Hall (Shoshone and Bannock)	Salt Lake City VA HCS
White Earth	Fargo VA HCS
Leech Lake	St. Cloud VA HCS
Blackfeet	Montana VA HCS
Apsalooka (Crow)	Sheridan VAMC
Lumbee	Fayetteville (NC) VAMC
Turtle Mountain	Fargo VA HCS

Tribe	Parent VA MC/HCS
Zuni	New Mexico VA HCS
Cherokee	Eastern OK VA HCS (Muskogee)
Choctaw	Eastern OK VA HCS (Muskogee)
Muscogee (Creek)	Eastern OK VA HCS (Muskogee)
Osage	Eastern OK VA HCS (Muskogee)
Cheyenne/Arapaho	Oklahoma City VA HCS
Warm Springs	Portland VAMC
Oglala (Pine Ridge)	Black Hills VA HCS
Sicangu Lakota Oyate (Rosebud)	Black Hills VA HCS
Standing Rock Sioux	Black Hills VA HCS
Spokane	Spokane VA HCS
Colville	Spokane VA HCS
Yakama	Walla Walla VAMC
Oneida of Wisconsin	Milwaukee VAMC

From Homeless to Housed: Native Voices

A Note of Caution

Providing a disclaimer for exposure to sensitive content.

The content of this session will include topics that may be difficult to confront or discuss.

Please ensure self-care while taking a step away as needed for your best interest.



Choose **VA**

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Historical Trauma

Three Lakota Boys, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, ca. 1900



- Removal from historical land and put on reservations – poor land determined to be undesirable
- The Trail of Tears/The Long Walk, other relocation – sickness and deaths
- Malicious actions toward Native Peoples – e.g., smallpox infested blankets given to Native peoples
- Forced removal of children to Indian Boarding Schools
- Starvation due to poor quality food rations/ insufficient food
- Underfunding housing and healthcare, despite treaties promising to provide those
- Exploitation of resources on Indian reservations
- Not respecting tribal sovereignty
- Laws. Citizenship in June 1924; State laws prevented some voting rights until 1957

Current Trauma

- War – **Native Americans serve in the military in U.S. at a higher rate than other races, per population**
- Native Language is becoming Extinct
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous People
- Impacts of Substance Use Disorders on families and communities
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Deep poverty
- Homelessness/Houseless and/or severely overcrowded housing
- Higher rates of suicide, especially among youth and young adults
- Climate Crisis
- Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)
- Impacts of historical trauma – parenting skills, loss of traditional culture, language, tribal identity, loss of family members who didn't return from Indian Boarding schools, etc.



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Strength in Resilience and Hope

- Resilience
- Commitment to Family
- Wisdom of Elders
- Shared responsibilities
- Shared values
- Accountability
- Self-Sacrifice
- Honor in Veterans
- Reverence for the land and environment
- Collective successes
- Cultural connectedness and Traditions
- Spirituality
- Generosity
- Indigenous Joy
- Culture is Prevention

Sustaining Relationships

- Going the extra mile: Equity: The quality of being fair and impartial
 - Meet Veterans where it is convenient for the Veteran and family.
 - Plan to leave several messages and send letters with *ample* time for a response.
 - Establish trust over time.
 - Conversational approach.
 - Motivational Interviewing skills are essential.
 - Build relationships with community members and stakeholders, including housing authority and tribal authorities.



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Cultural Considerations

- As with any type of engagement, engaging tribes and tribal families is all about relationships.
- Understand historical and intergenerational trauma and its effects. Even when trauma is generations in the past, historical trauma has a very real effect on the way tribes and tribal families relate to those outside the tribe. This type of trauma impacts each tribe differently.
- Many in the Native community do not trust services provided by the Federal government or Federal government workers as those contacts have been extremely harmful and traumatic in the past.
- Leverage peers and non-profit partners (SSVF, COC) in outreach and engagement to build trust
- Be aware of your own biases, both implicit and explicit, and work to check those to ensure you are not projecting your own belief system and values onto others.
- For many AI/AN Veterans, culture is healing.
- Tribes do not subscribe to physical health as a standalone concept, but instead understand health holistically.

Cultural Considerations

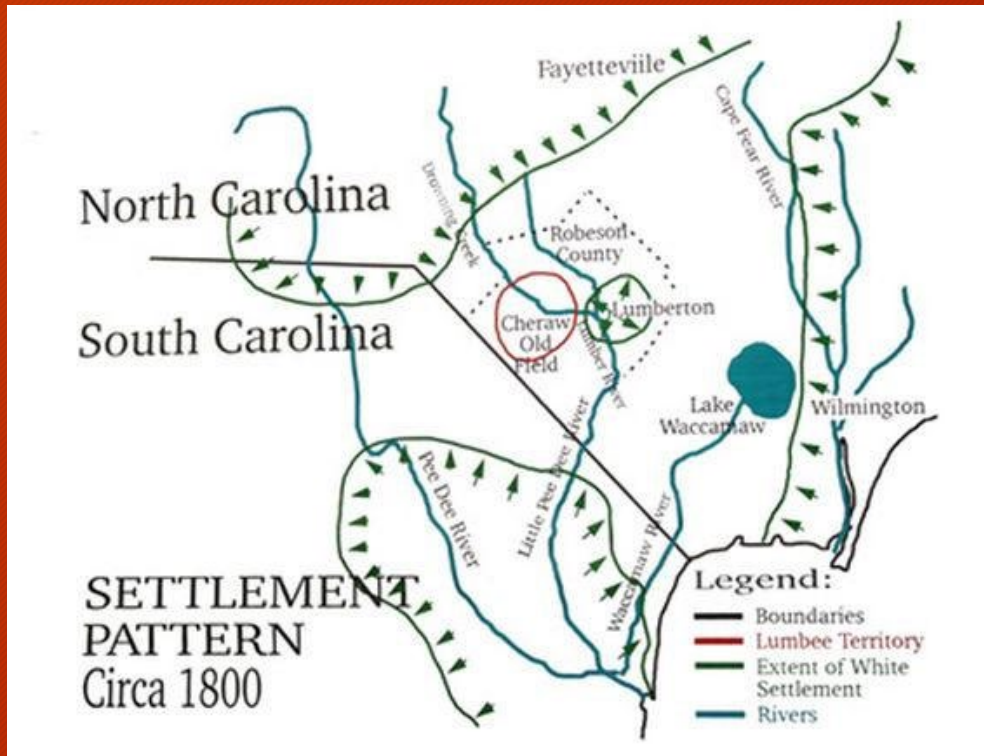
- Take into consideration that each tribe is unique. Be willing to explore the history of the Veteran/family being served. This can be completed by making a connection with the Veteran, taking interest in becoming culturally competent and asking if they would be willing to share which tribe they are connected to.
- Listen and observe more than you speak. Learn to be comfortable with silence or long pauses in conversation. Personal history is often told in stories, rather than a direct response to a question, so you must be willing to listen to the story unfold without interrupting. This also shows respect for the Veteran's process to impart important information.
- Urban Indian Organizations and Indian Health Services have connections with tribal communities and would be of great assistance to the Veterans.
- If you are invited by a tribe to participate in an event, accept if possible, as this is another way to show respect, be present and learn about the culture.
- If you're visiting an AI/AN Veteran or family, you may be offered a beverage or food. It is important to accept.



Who are the Lumbee?

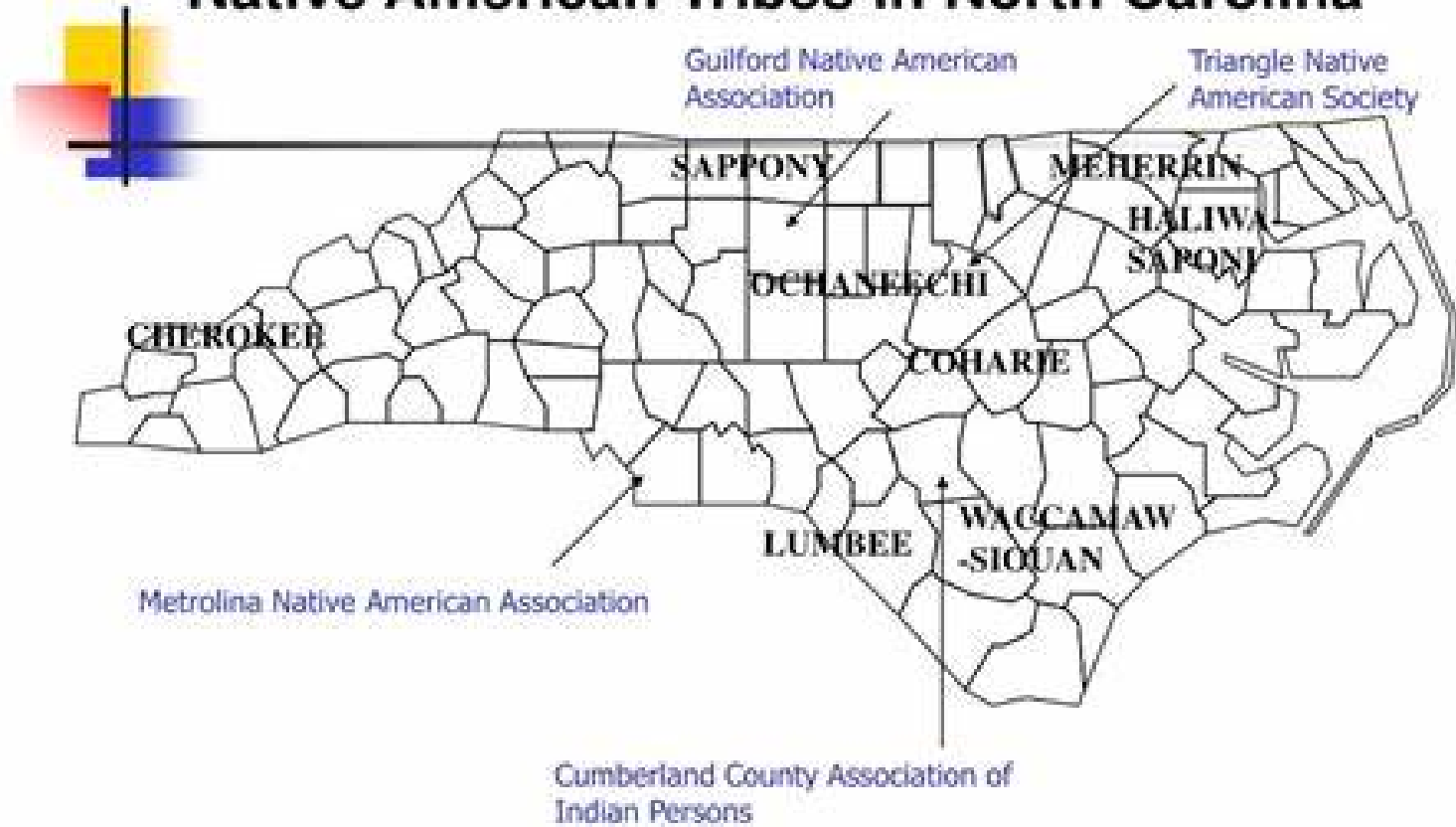
- The 55,000 members of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina reside primarily in Robeson, Hoke, Cumberland and Scotland counties. The Lumbee Tribe is the largest tribe in North Carolina, the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River and the ninth largest in the nation. The Lumbee take their name from the Lumbee River which winds its way through Robeson County. Pembroke, North Carolina is the economic, cultural and political center of the tribe.
- The Lumbee people have been recognized by the state of North Carolina since 1885, and at the same time established a separate school system that would benefit tribal members. In 1887, the state established the Croatan Normal Indian School, which is today The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In 1956 a bill was passed by the United States Congress which recognized the Lumbee as Indian, but denied the tribe full status as a federally recognized Indian tribe. The fight for Federal recognition has been ongoing and sought through federal legislation.

History and Origins



The Lumbee are the amalgamation of various Siouan, Algonquian, and Iroquoian speaking tribes. The earliest document showing Indian communities in the area of Drowning Creek is a map prepared by John Herbert, the commissioner of Indian trade for the Wineau Factory on the Black River, in 1725. Herbert identifies the four Siouan-speaking communities as the Saraws, Pedee, Scavanos, and Wacomas. (Note: Drowning Creek is presently known as the Lumber River, and flows through present-day Robeson County. Many Lumbee people also know it as the Lumbee River.)

Native American Tribes in North Carolina



Missing and
Murdered
Indigenous
Women

Disparity in
medical and
behavioral health
services

Loss of Native
language

Effects of Historical Trauma into Modern Day Trauma

Spirituality vs
Religion

Substance usage

Overrepresented
within Foster
Care

Barriers to Case Management

Housing Stock

Employment in Rural Areas

Transportation

Resources within the communities

Substance Use

Stigma of receiving Assistance



Coordinating Treatment and Creating Safety Networks

Rev. Evert was the oldest living Lumbee Tribal member, as well as the oldest Lumbee Veteran to serve in World War I. (Credit: WPDE/FILE)

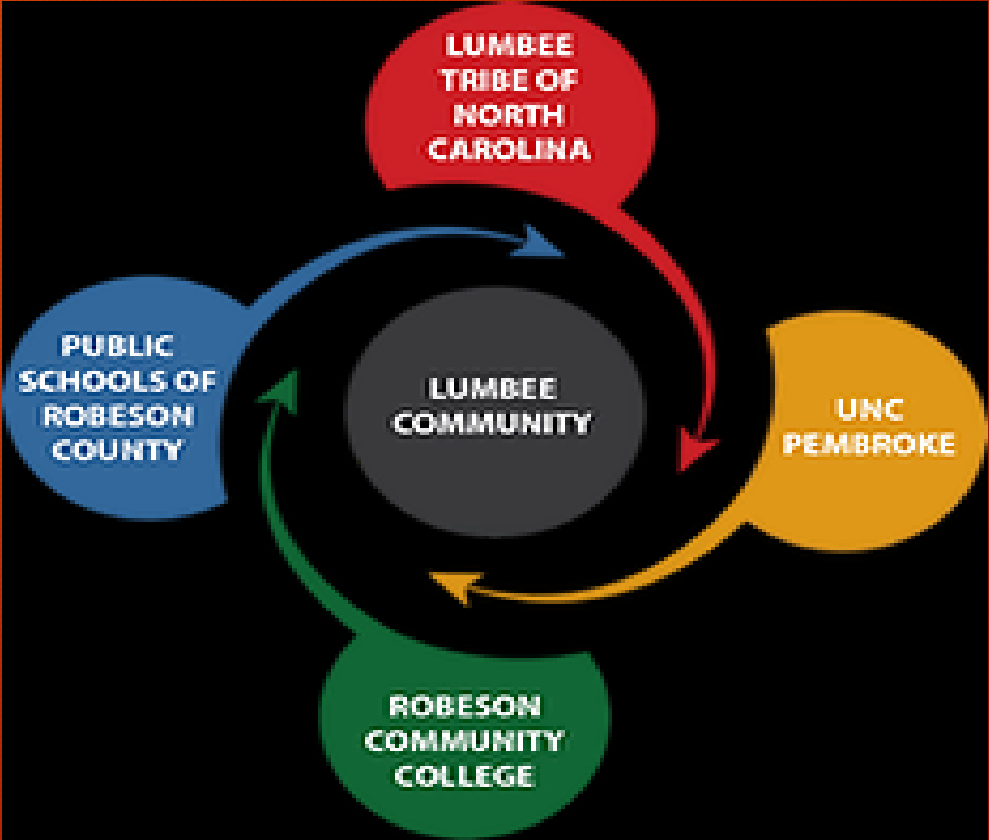
Person
Centered
Approached



Engagement and Outreach Strategies

- Engagement and Partnership throughout process is Key!
- Coordination of care with community partnerships (transportation/partnerships for rural care for basic housing needs/
- Monthly Meetings with Tribally Designated Entity
- Participation in Tribally led events
- Provide Veterans with Tribal newsletters quarterly, encourage participation in cultural events and VA based groups.
- Participate in ceremonial practices as agreed to by Veteran (smudging/request of prayer/talking circles/cultural workshops)
- Strategy developed during Covid: Porch Therapy

Cultivating Relationships within the Community



Coordinating with Tribal Services

- Energy Assistance
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Veteran Services
- Youth Services
- Tribal Enrollment
- Aquatic Center
- Lumbee Tribal Support Services
- Housing Services



Maintaining Cultural Connections

Arbor



Powwow



Pool



Play Ground



Opportunities for Housing Advancements

Homeless



HUD VASH Home



Homeownership



Warriors' Way Veterans Village



Warriors' Way Veterans Village



Lumbee Tribe Housing Programs

- Tribal HUD-VASH
- Rehabilitation
- New Construction
- Down Payment
- Homeownership
- Elderly Housing Program
- Student Housing Program



Suggestions for Cultural Resources

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) culture card [American Indian and Alaska Native Culture Card | SAMHSA Publications and Digital Products](#)
- SAMHSA's Treatment Improvement Protocol 61 is a detailed tool for behavioral health service providers who want to enhance their cultural competence in relationships with AI/AN people, also written by Native American behavioral health care professionals. [TIP 61: Behavioral Health Services for American Indians and Alaska Natives | SAMHSA Publications and Digital Products](#)
- The VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) SharePoint contains resources that highlight issues, mental health concerns, as well as the resiliency of Native Americans. [Native American History and Resources](#)

Suggestions for Cultural Resources

- The Office of Rural Health supports innovative programs that increase rural Veterans' access to whole health care. The Office of Rural Health developed a Native American Veteran Homelessness Toolkit that can be useful for assisting AI/AN Veterans in rural areas. [Native American Veteran Homelessness Toolkit v1.0 - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)
- The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is a diverse and multifaceted cultural educational enterprise and visible component of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex. The NMAI is dedicated to acting as a resource for the hemisphere's Native communities and to serving the greater public as an honest and thoughtful conduit to Native cultures, present and past, in all their richness, depth, and diversity. [Native American Veterans | National Museum of the American Indian \(si.edu\)](#)
- The Office of Tribal Government Relations (OTGR) team works to strengthen and build closer relations between VA, tribal governments, and other key federal, state, private, and non-profit partners to serve Veterans across Indian Country effectively and respectfully. [Tribal Government Relations - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

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