

2023 VA Permanent Housing Conference Dallas

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

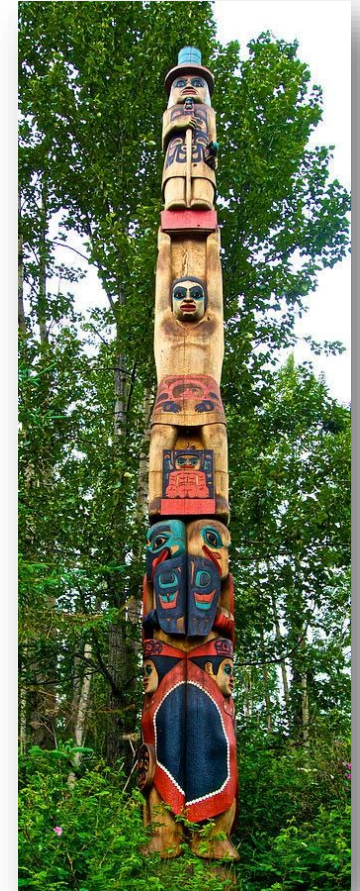
- VA is working to make resources better known and accessible to AI/AN Veterans.
- Developed an AI/AN specific HPO Brochure: [Resources for Native American Veterans Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- With Indian Health Service's geographer, developed a map that overlays UIOs locations with VHA facilities 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.

Navajo Nation



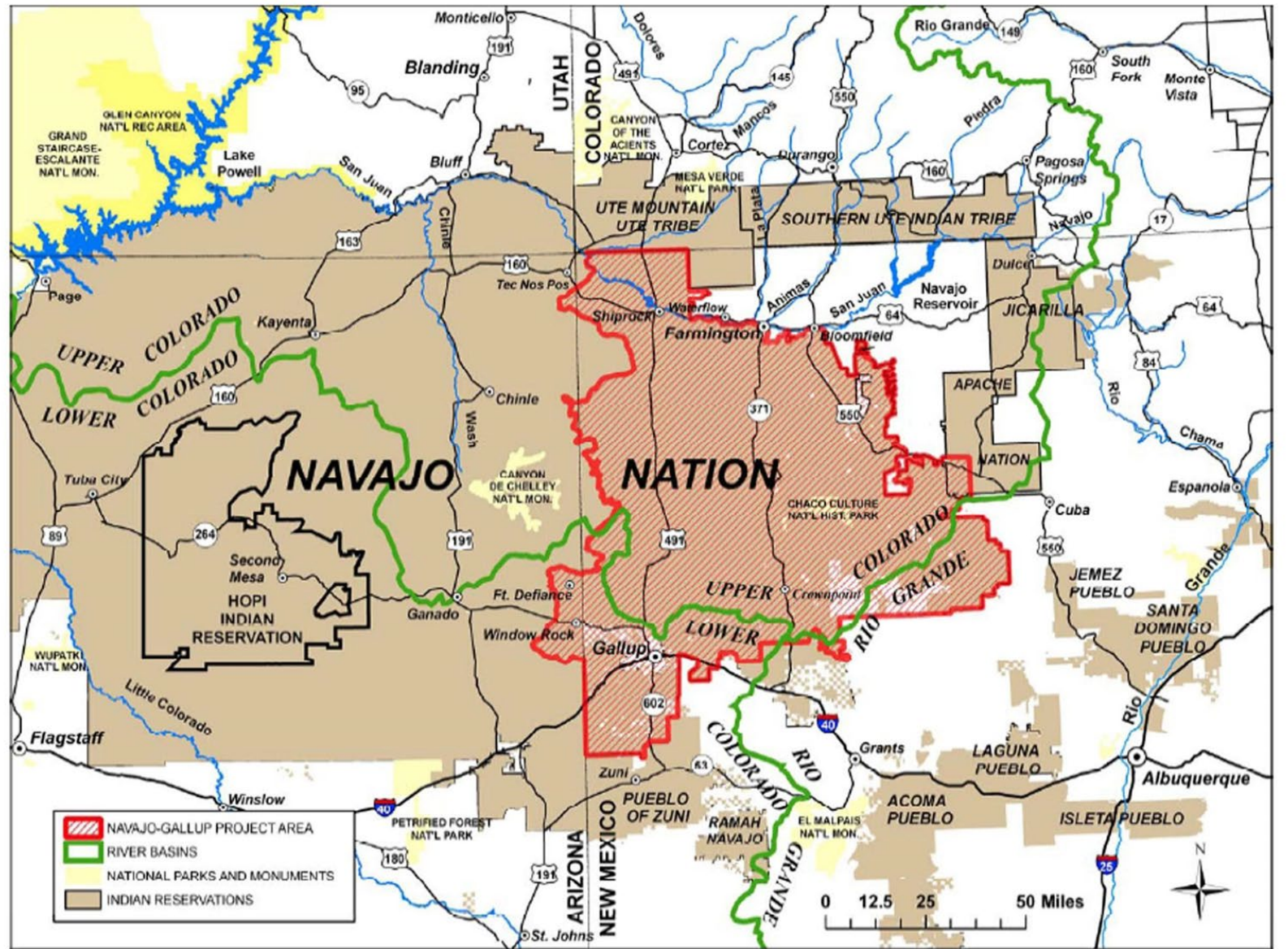
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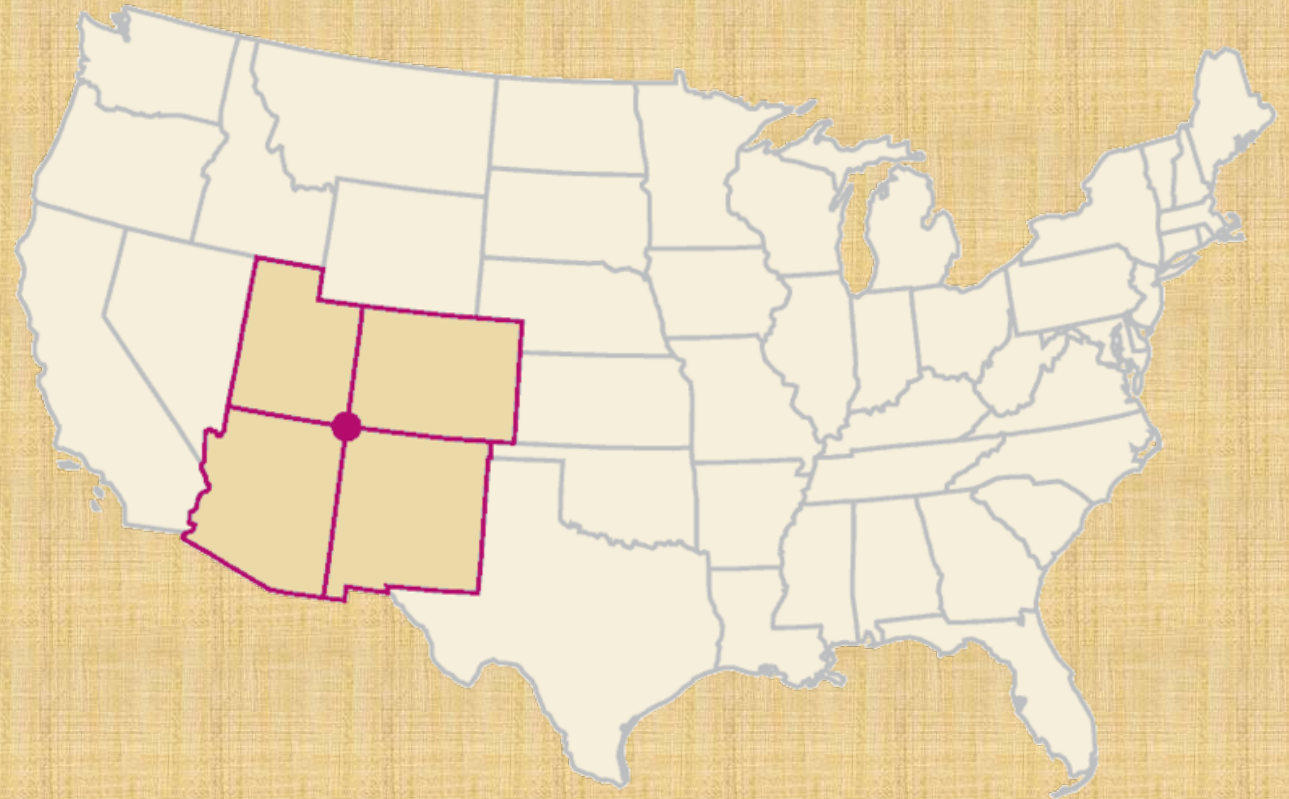
Geography

- 27,000 square miles. Larger than 10 of the 50 states in America.
- Population surpasses 250,000.
- At more than 300,000 members strong, the Navajo Nation is one of the most powerful Native nations in the United States, with the largest land base.
- Navajo HUD VASH covers any area on the reservation, as well as border towns and cities including Farmington, NM, Gallup, NM, and Albuquerque, NM. Navajo HUD VASH also covers towns along Interstate 40 corridor and the areas of Flagstaff, AZ and as far south as Prescott/Prescott Valley, AZ.



Four Corners

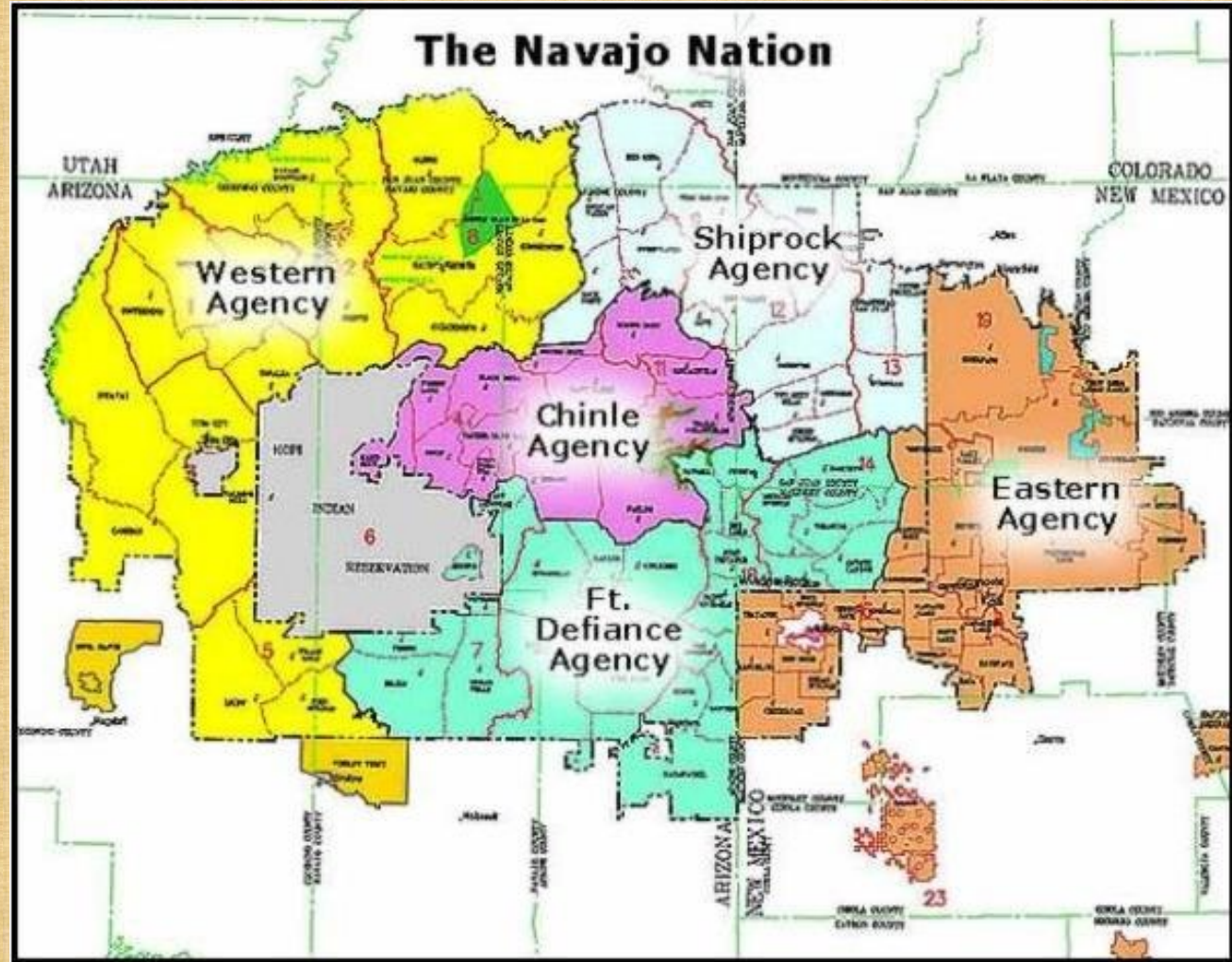
- The **Four Corners** is a region of the United States consisting of the southwestern corner of [Colorado](#), southeastern corner of [Utah](#), northeastern corner of [Arizona](#), and northwestern corner of [New Mexico](#).
- The boundaries of the four states meet, and are marked by the [Four Corners Monument](#). It is the only location in the United States where four states meet.
- Most of the Four Corners region belongs to [Native American](#) nations, the largest of which is the [Navajo Nation](#), followed by [Hopi](#), [Ute](#), and [Zuni](#) tribal reserves and nations.
- The Four Corners is home to the capital of the Navajo tribal government at [Window Rock](#), Arizona.



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Government

- The Navajo Nation is divided into five agencies, with the seat of government located at the Navajo Governmental Campus at [Window Rock/Tségháhoodzání](#).
- Elected government includes an executive office, a legislative house, and a judicial system.
- President: Jonathan Nez.
- [There are 110 Chapters](#), which are modeled after governments such as counties or townships. Each Chapter elected officers and followed parliamentary procedures.
- The Navajo Nation retains executive offices in the national capital, Washington DC, for lobbying and congressional services.



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Navajo Flag

- Copper color with the original 1868 Treaty Reservation in Dark Brown.
- At the cardinal points in the tan field are the four sacred mountains.
- A rainbow symbolizing Navajo sovereignty arches over the Nation and the sacred mountains.
- In the center of the Nation, a circular symbol depicts the sun above two green stalks of corn, which surrounds three animals representing the Navajo livestock economy, and a traditional hogan and modern home.
- Between the hogan and the house is an oil derrick symbolizing the resource potential of the Tribe, and above this are representations of the wild fauna of the Nation.
- At the top near the sun, the modern sawmill symbolizes the progress and industry characteristic of the Navajo Nation's economic development.

The Diné: “The People” or “Children of the Holy People”.



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Traditional Hogan



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Historical Trauma and Equity

Historical trauma is the cumulative, multigenerational, collective experience of emotional and psychological injury in communities and in descendants. One of the most familiar examples of historical trauma is that experienced by Native Americans. www.samhsa.gov

The term “equity” refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality: Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. www.NACEWeb.org



Affects of Historical Trauma

- Mistrust of government/institutions
- Sense of powerlessness and hopelessness
- What helps?
 - Honesty, clarity and transparency
 - Provide culturally-appropriate resources as well as VA resources
 - Offer choices/options
 - Give people time to respond
 - Consider historical trauma when considering housing options. Ex: Senior Complex resembling boarding school
 - Historical unresolved grief or “soul wound”
 - Generational post-traumatic stress
 - Make best effort to provide housing on or near Tribal land



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The Long Walk and Navajo Treaty of 1868

- 1864 deportation and attempted ethnic cleansing of the Navajo people.
- Approximant 350 mile march from Arizona to eastern new Mexico.
- At least 200 died during the 18-day, 300-mile (500-km) trek. Between 8,000 and 9,000 people were settled on an area of 40 square miles (104 km²), with a peak population of 9,022 by the spring of 1865.
- Between August 1864 and the end of 1866, some 53 different forced marches occurred.
- On June 1, 1868, a delegation of Navajo leaders signed with X's a "treaty and agreement" with the United States that ended the exile of the Navajo from their ancestral homeland and their incarceration at Fort Sumner.



Native American Code Talkers

- Code talkers represented over 30 tribes.
- On November 20, 2013, Native American code talkers from 33 North American tribes were honored at the nation's capitol and were awarded Congressional Gold Medals.
- During this ceremony, American Congressman Cole then shared his thoughts. “It is an enormous honor for me to get to share this moment with you – no one has fought against an alliance like Native Americans. Native Americans enlist at a higher rate than any ethnicity in this land. Most famous of those warriors are the Navajo code talkers of World War II, but 33 different tribes contributed to the code talkers.”



Navajo Code Talkers

- In May 1942, the first 29 Navajo recruits attended boot camp. Then, at Camp Pendleton , Oceanside , California , this first group created the Navajo code.
- Approximately 400 Navajos were trained as code talkers.
- Navajo code talkers of World War II were honored for their contributions to defense on Sept. 17, 1992, at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Photo # USMC 127-MN-57875 Toledo Cousins, Navajo Indian Code Talkers, July 1943



Building and Sustaining Relationships

- Equity: The quality of being fair and impartial.
 - Go the extra mile
 - 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. Ex: Mateo



Additional Factors to Consider

Understand it is common to listen first and then speak. Not talking does not mean the person is not listening. Ex. Advocating for Veteran

Include family and community

Don't be offended

Indian Country is small. Be careful how you talk about others

Moving forward and not looking back (SUD Treatment)

MI skills essential

Alcohol related deaths 5xs greater than U.S. rates for all races

Suicide is the 2nd. Leading cause of death for AI/AN between ages 10-34.



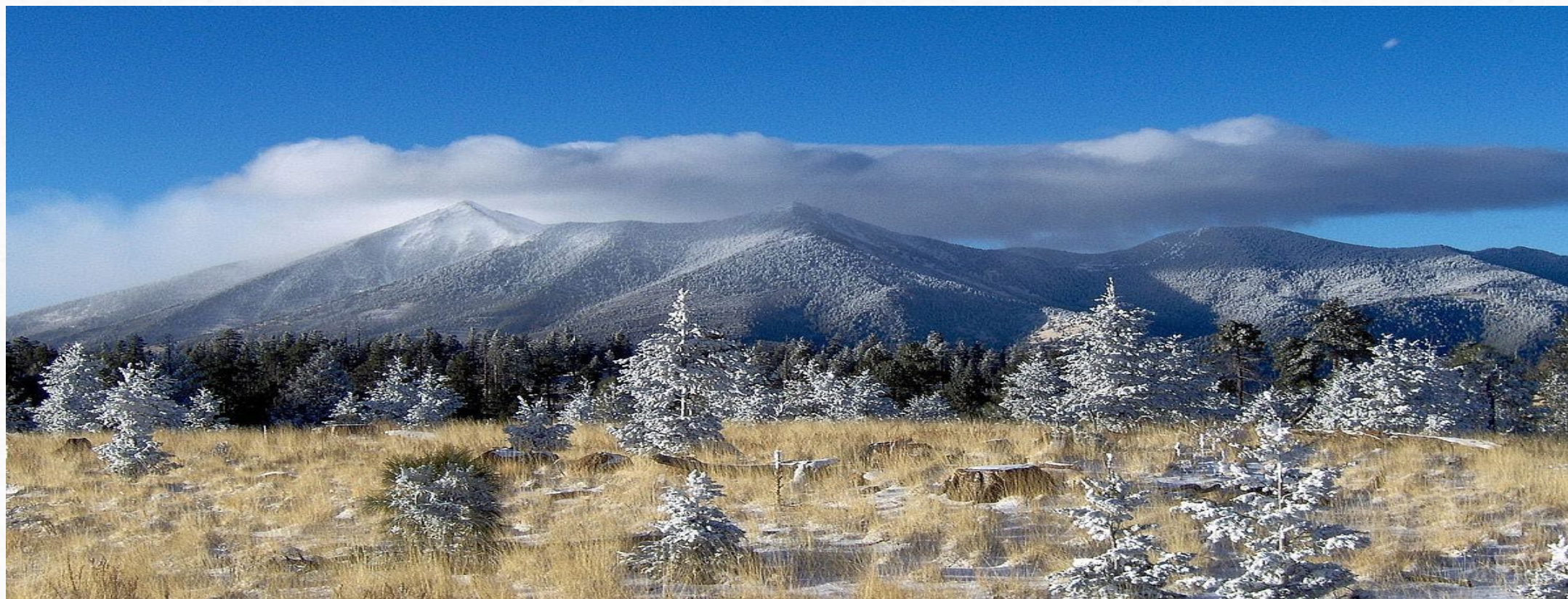
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Other Cultural Factors Influencing Service Delivery

- Moving off Tribal land (physical and psychological impact)
- Taboos and other cultural beliefs
 - Suicide risk assessments and discussions
 - What can impact scheduled appointments
 - Be careful with perceptions.
 - Ex: Chapter House discussion
 - Be transparent with expectations
 - Be willing to share something about yourself
 - Be ready to hear their story
 - Ask about traditional healing and provide resources
 - Saying “Goodbye” vs. “See you later!”



Spirituality

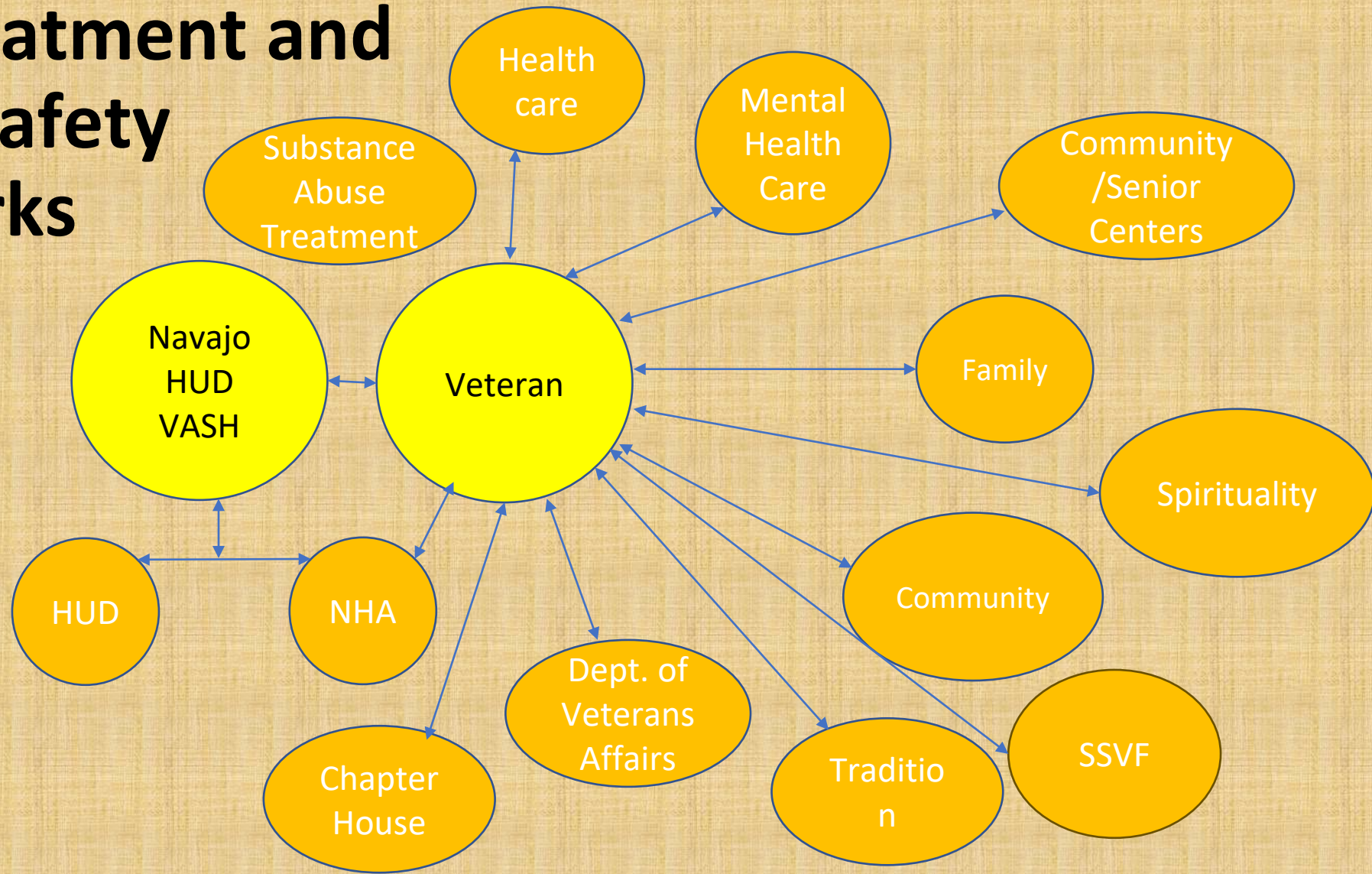


Dook'o'oosłíid—(Navajo) ("Dook'o'oosłíid," which means "the summit which never melts" or "the mountain which peak never thaws.")

Coordinating Treatment and Creating Safety Networks



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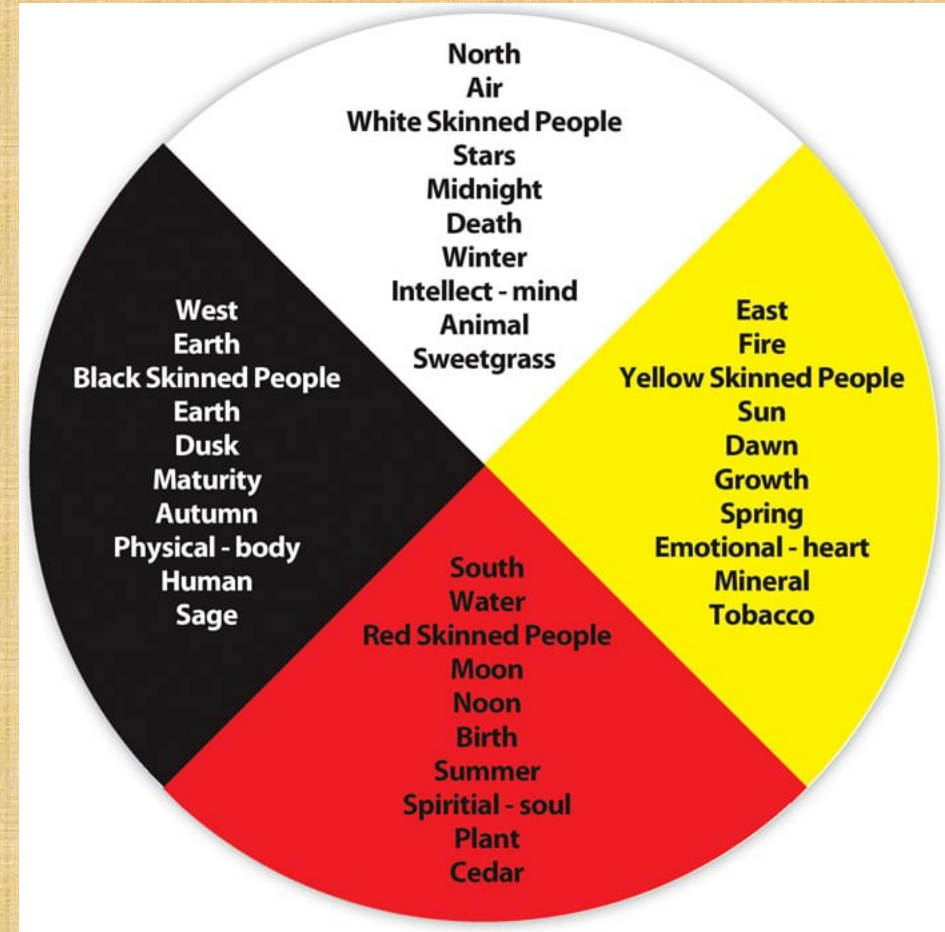


Whole Health and Medicine Wheel

- Whole Health Approach



- Medicine Wheel



Whole Health Approach and Medicine Wheel

- **Whole Health Approach**

- [Mindful Awareness](#) – Being aware of thoughts and feelings to focus on the present.
- [Moving the Body](#) – Exercising and moving for energy, flexibility, and strength.
- [Surroundings](#) – Having comfortable, healthy spaces that support your body and emotions.
- [Personal Development](#) – Moving toward what matters most to you.
- [Food and Drink](#) – Nourishing your body to not only live, but to live well.
- [Recharge](#) – Getting enough sleep, rest, relaxation.
- [Family, friends, and co-workers](#) – Developing close, loving, supportive relationships with others.
- [Spirit and Soul](#) – Cultivating a sense of connection, purpose, and meaning.
- [Power of the Mind](#) – Tapping into your ability to heal and cope through mind-body approaches.

- **Medicine Wheel**

- The Medicine Wheel teaches us that we have four aspects to ourselves:
- The physical
- The mental
- The emotional
- The spiritual.

Each must be in balance and equally developed in order for us to remain healthy, happy individuals.

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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