## ANALYSIS OF

# TRADITIONAL FOOD PROGRAMS

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Traditional Food programs at **Urban Indian Organizations** help address chronic diseases.

#### Pre-Contact Traditional Foods in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

- Diets and foods varied by region.
- Many traditional plant-based foods, i.e., sweet potatoes, squash, beans, corn, and wild rice have low-fat content, low glycemic index, and are rich in proteins, amino acids, antioxidants, and fiber. 1
- Diets were protective against type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity.<sup>2</sup>

#### Effects of Colonization

Suppression of tradition, language, culture, and foods

#### Loss of Traditional Foods

- Historic and current US assimilation policies and other governmental regulations destroy or disrupt access to Traditional Foods.
  - Residential Boarding Schools<sup>4</sup>
- Fish Wars<sup>°</sup>
- Bison Slaughter<sup>5</sup>
- Failure to protect food gathering rights<sup>7</sup>
- Forced relocation to reservations in different regions disrupted Traditional Food production and pathways.



#### Poverty

- Potential reliance on government programs for food assistance 13
- Limited income to acquire healthier foods 14

#### Historical Trauma

- Stress associated with previous policies that promoted violence and the erasure of American Indian and Alaska Native identities, cultures, and Indigenous knowledge.
- Physiological stress manifested as serious public health concerns. 15

#### Food Insecurity Among Urban American Indian and Alaska Native Populations

- Access to Traditional Foods can be expensive.
- A 2016-2021 national study reported that AI/AN people have the highest food insecurity rate at 23.3%.11
- A study on one urban AI/AN community reported 80% food insecurity. 12
- Urban AI/AN people might experience exclusion from Tribal food programs.
- Disconnect from Tribal community support systems.9
- Some Urban Indian Organizations are located in food deserts, areas without easy access to affordable and healthy groceries.10

#### Government Food Assistance Programs

- Historically, generally unhealthy non-Traditional Food rations were given to many Tribes.
- Currently, food commodities revolve around canned and preserved foods. 8

#### **Epidemic of Chronic Diseases**

- AI/AN people are disproportionally affected by diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and mental health disorders. "
- Diabetes and heart disease are among the top five leading causes of death for urban AI/AN people. 17



#### Traditional Food Programs

#### Urban Indian Organizations identified four common programs where Traditional Foods can be incorporated

- Structure and operation of these programs vary by Urban Indian Organization
- Increase social and cultural connection
- Increase sense of community

#### Nutritional Counseling

- Can improve quality of life 20
- Increases cooking self-efficacy and diet-related self-management "
- Description Can improve body composition, diet, nutrition knowledge, and physical activity in children and adolescents<sup>22</sup>

Address historical trauma

Promote intergenerational knowledge on Traditional Foods

Improve mental/physical/behavioral heath 18

- Provide patients with fresh produce from health care facilities or vouchers to use in the community
- Help address food insecurity<sup>23</sup>
- Improve overall health

### Community Gardens

- Enhance access to Traditional
- Increase access and consumption of whole foods
- Increase physical activity
- Promote food sovereignty
- Improve mental health<sup>24</sup>

#### Special Diabetes Programs for Indians

- Helps manage and prevent diabetes
- Improves hemoglobin A1C, total and LDL cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure 19

#### Food Prescriptions

Read more about Traditional Food programs at UIOs in NCUIH's report, "Recent Trends in Third Party Billing: Thematic Analysis of Traditional Food Programs at Urban Indian Organizations and Research on Traditional Healing"