The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) is the national non-profit organization devoted to the support and development of quality, accessible, and culturally-competent health and public health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) living in urban areas.

NCUIH is the only national representative of the 41 Title V Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) under the Indian Health Service (IHS) in the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA). NCUIH strives to improve the health of the over 70% of the AI/AN population that lives in urban areas, supported by quality, accessible health care centers.

Strength-based Strategies for Urban Native Youth Coping with Isolation
ABOUT NCUIH

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Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the harms of social & physical isolation in urban Native youth with health challenges
2. Identifying strength-based strategies for overcoming the negative effects of isolation that are experienced by youth with health challenges
3. Improve capacity to implement strength-based strategies using virtual platforms during the pandemic.
What is Social Isolation?

- Social isolation is the absence of social contact due to being disconnected from social networks. Isolation leads to loneliness, which is the emotional distress that results from feeling socially disconnected.
What Causes Social Isolation?

• Mental and physical Health problems
• Not living near family or friends
• Living alone
• Dissatisfaction with family/social life
• Chronic illness
• Lack of accessibility
• Exposure to domestic/community violence
• Disconnection from culture.
Why Native Youth May Be at High Risk of isolation:

• Chronic conditions – dealing with chronic medical conditions comes with a host of reasons (embarrassment, lack of accessibility) that may prevent youth from feeling included.

• Lack of access to technology needed for virtual connection with friends/family/health care providers

• Disconnect from elders/cultural knowledge especially in urban environments

• Accessibility barriers – lack of transportation or inability to afford safe transportation
So Why do We Worry about Social Isolation?

• Social isolation can increase risk of premature mortality by 29%
• Increase heart disease by 29%,
• Increase stroke risk by 32%.
• Poorer general health and wellbeing
• This is especially related to depression, deaths of despair such as drug and alcohol-related deaths/suicide.
• Biological: pathways through cardiovascular, endocrine and immune markers – greater amount of social connectedness associated with lower risk for physiological dysregulation and lower inflammation.
How Does COVID-19 affect social isolation?

- COVID-19 is likely to increase social isolation and loneliness, especially among individuals with health conditions.
- Many care facilities were shut down so specialized care was not available – connection between providers changed or lost
- Physically isolated from friends and family
- Native youth less likely to have the technology needed to participate in a virtual world
- Unable to participate in traditional activities due to lockdown regulations
How Does COVID-19 affect social isolation? continued

• COVID-19 has shown an increased risk of social isolation and therefore, harm may occur as a result.

• Survey responses from June 2020 shows that there was a significant increase in individuals experiencing negative mental health risks, especially related to depression, suicidal ideation and substance misuse.

• This risk was highest among young (18–24-year-old) persons.
What can be done?

• Lots of strategies for reducing social isolation and coping with loneliness:
  • Behavioral lifestyle factors: better sleep, exercise, medical adherence, engagement in extracurricular activities, making cultural activities more accessible, holding virtual healing ceremonies, providing art kits for activities.
Specific Strategies for Organizations:

• Public transportation to connect youth to their community
  • Bus passes
  • Subway cards
  • Gift cards for gas

• Implementing family-friendly policies:
  • Paid family leave
  • Maintaining flexible schedules
  • Paid time off for part time employees (who are often youth).

• Overcome technology access issues:
  • Provide BOTH equipment like smartphones, tablets or laptops and internet AND data for accessing virtual activities.
Specific Strategies for Organizations continued

• Providing behavioral wellness through food and nutrition
  • Community gardens for growing food and medicine
  • Expanding benefits (such as SNAP) to be used at farmers markets
  • Education on minimizing food waste
  • Providing transportation or food to underserved communities.
  • Providing training on traditional medicines and foods
• Funding, networking with local organizations. Building coalitions with non-health organizations (Department of Transportation, Department of Agriculture).
THANK YOU