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.

Supporting Youth with Identity Formation during COVID-19
ABOUT NCUIH

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Learning Objectives:

1. Understand identity formation as a critical aspect of health during the formative years of adolescence.
2. Understand the role that culture and connection to community plays in identity formation for Native youth.
3. Address challenges to identity formation due to COVID-19, especially as it relates to re-integration.
4. Build capacity to provide support systems for the ongoing effects of COVID-19 on identity formation.
What is Identity Formation?

• In the broadest sense, Identity Formation means finding one’s place in the world. In youth and young adults, identity formation is a *critical aspect* of the transition period that is known in life course theory as “Emerging Adulthood”.

Overview of Life Course Theory

• The life course perspective “looks at how chronological age, relationships, common life transitions, and social change shape people’s lives from birth to death”. (Elizabeth D. Hutchison)

• https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/36521_CLC_Chapter1.pdf
Overview of Life Course Theory

Birth
- Birth registration under 5
- Mortality rate
- % under 6 months fed breast milk
- Prevalence of stunting/vaasting in children under 5
- % of children 19-23 months receiving 1 year of pre-primary education
- IECD achievement index

Adolescent exploration
- % girls and women 25-49 married or in union before 18
- Ministry of foundational skills, literacy, and numeracy by the end of pre-secondary

Establishment into adulthood
- % women 20-24 married or in union before 18
- Secondary school completion
- Proficiency in a broad range of learning outcomes by the end of lower secondary
- Tertiary enrollment rates for boys and girls

Maintenance years
- % eligible population covered by social protection programmes
- Proportion population living below $1.25 per day
- Ancestral care coverage

Older age
- % girls and women 25-49 experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the last 12 months
- Education goal
- Health goal
- Economic growth
- Gender equality
- Poverty goal
- Nutrition goal
- Social inclusion

Note
This diagram presents a non-exhaustive set of hypothesized causal relationships between SDG indicators. The indicators presented here are a subset, focused on those with direct relevance for children. The positions of the indicators are suggestive of the expected time of the outcome measured.
Overview of Life Course Theory

• Between the stages of Adolescent Exploration and Establishment into Adulthood, there is an important transition stage.
• This stage is referred to as “Emerging Adulthood”
• It is theorized that there 5 milestones or rites of passage that are essential to transitioning through Emerging Adulthood.
Overview of Life Course Theory

• The five milestones are:
  • Financial Independence
  • Completion of Education
  • Moving into a Career
  • Marriage
  • Parenthood

• These milestones are continuously changing due to the evolving social and cultural environments of the current time.

• A new milestone (self-actualization) is now theorized to be more important, while previous milestones (marriage, parenthood) are less applicable to younger generations.
So Why Is Identity Formation So Important?

- During identity formation, youth develop
- WHO they are
- WHAT they believe
- WHY they believe what they believe
- Developing this “sense of self” is critical to youth transitioning from adolescence to the responsibilities of adulthood
What Else Happens During Identity Formation?

• Establishing a moral code – ethics and ideals. Sense of right and wrong.
• Affiliation with labels and groups – this helps youth establish connections and a sense of belonging outside of their family unit.
• Testing established boundaries and learning how to set appropriate boundaries within their own relationships.
• Moving away from family both physically and idealistically (family values)
• Pursuing goals and dreams (education, career) independently.
BUT IT’S NOT EASY...
Challenges to Identity Formation

• Not feeling accepted
• Feeling misunderstood
• Additional stress due to increased responsibilities
• No accessibility – unable to participate in both physical and virtual spaces
• Difficult to fully participate in many cultural activities
• Lessened connection to culture/family
• Struggles with mental health, especially anxiety and depression
How Does COVID-19 Affect Identity Formation?

• Sudden changes and disruption of routine. For some, there were constant changes as restrictions kept changing.
• Being stuck, literally and figuratively, with family = no place to escape and explore
• Family is not always accepting or supportive, may be toxic/dangerous situations
• Not able to celebrate milestones, or even accomplish some (like getting a driver’s license).
• Re-integration after COVID lockdowns may cause difficulty when re-establishing a new routine and handling change.
How Does COVID-19 Affect Identity Formation? continued

• Not able to participate in sports, clubs, cultural groups that give a sense of self worth and an opportunity for growth
• Loneliness and lack of connection to friends and classmates
• Isolation from support services, such as therapists, social workers or school counselors
How Can You Support Identity Formation for Your Youth Community Members?

• Give youth opportunities to interact with the Native community – cultural arts activities, learning sessions on traditional medicines/foods.
• Send consistent and frequent reminders for events.
• Be a sounding board – be there to listen and support
• Have a non-judgmental patient attitude
• Emphasize the importance of self-care, especially practicing patience with oneself
• Be the role model – lead by example.
• Let go – ultimately, they will be independent adults.
How Can Organizations Support Identity Formation?

• Provide opportunities for growth through internships, mentoring and volunteering

• Encourage participation by making sure there is “space at the table” for youth/young adults to have their voices heard.
  • Inclusion of students on Executive Boards is one strategy for participation.

• Planning and logistics – always provide detailed instructions for participation and attempt to overcome accessibility challenges when possible.
  • Ask: who has internet? Who might be living in a difficult environment? How can I help?
How Can Organizations Support Identity Formation? continued

• Provide safe spaces for knowledge building, confidentiality, with cultural components.

• Offer transitional skills:
  • Financial literacy (bank account, managing money)
  • CV/Resume building, job hunting, interview assistance
  • Health literacy, acquiring over the counter supplies, managing self care
  • Time management & sense of work ethic,
  • Maintaining total wellbeing (emotional/physical/spiritual)
  • Engagement with their tribal or urban Native community through spiritual practices & indigenous framework.
How Can Organizations Support Identity Formation? continued

• Acknowledge milestones (concerts, plays, graduations) through community efforts
  • Drawing upon the community to create gifts or send notes to recent graduates and young community members for their accomplishments

• Offer text for support services rather than phone/video calls to increase confidentiality and ease of access
Identity formation is an essential aspect of the transition period known as emerging adulthood. It is critical that youth/adolescents are able to fully participate in their exploration of identity in order to seamlessly transition into the responsibilities of adulthood.

There are many challenges associated with identity formation, particularly due to isolation & change during COVID-19.

Both organizations and individuals can provide support to Native youth for identity formation.
THANK YOU!