



## What Is Racial Misclassification On Death Certificates, And How Does It Affect American Indian And Alaska Native People?

People are often asked about their race and ethnicity on businesses or government forms, especially when completing legal documents. This helps experts identify who is using services, track business and public health trends, and identify where resources are needed. However, many people self-identify as American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) but end up recorded as another race in official government documents. Public health experts call this phenomenon: “Racial Misclassification”. When this happens on death certificates, the lack of complete and accurate data harms AI/AN people. It becomes hard to track demographic trends of who is dying from preventable deaths, where, and what resources are needed to address these problems. Death certificate racial data is recorded by funeral directors, coroners, or medical examiners - sometimes based merely on appearance or assumptions. When collecting racial data, funeral directors may be hesitant to ask the family questions about the decedent's race, or not be trained on how to ask or why it is important to do so. This leads to large errors in death record data, which harms the community.



### What Can Government And Other Policy Stakeholders Do To Prevent Racial Misclassification Of American Indian And Alaska Native People On Death Certificates?

- ➔ **Fund training and the creation of materials or resources, such as those described in the previous two recommendations sections for staff and professionals.** Continually promote and disseminate training and materials to support accurate data collection of race.
- ➔ **Require Continuing Education Credit (CEC) for licensing renewal, at all levels of experience.** This supports continued learning of new techniques and procedures.
- ➔ **Require that CECs cover demographic data collection and cultural competency.**
- ➔ **Train [Funeral Directors on how to use Funeral Directors’ Handbook on Death Registration and Fetal Death Reporting](#), and provide accompanying materials.**
- ➔ **Center the voices of AI/AN funeral directors, statisticians, and other professionals whenever implementing training or strategies to improve racial misclassification.**
- ➔ **Print race on the family copy of death certificates, and allow free corrections to death registration when the family identifies an error on race, ethnicity, or tribal affiliation.**
- ➔ **Invest in raising community awareness of funeral planning, preplanning, and the purpose and effects of vital records data.**