

# ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL FOOD PROGRAMS

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

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## 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.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Diets were protective against type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity.<sup>2</sup>



## Effects of Colonization

*Suppression of tradition, language, culture, and foods*<sup>3</sup>

### 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>6</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<sup>13</sup>
- ▶ Limited income to acquire healthier foods<sup>14</sup>

### 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.<sup>15</sup>

### 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%.<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ A study on one urban AI/AN community reported 80% food insecurity.<sup>12</sup>
- ▶ Urban AI/AN people might experience exclusion from Tribal food programs.
- ▶ Disconnect from Tribal community support systems.<sup>9</sup>
- ▶ Some Urban Indian Organizations are located in food deserts, areas without easy access to affordable and healthy groceries.<sup>10</sup>



## 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.<sup>8</sup>

## Epidemic of Chronic Diseases

- ▶ AI/AN people are disproportionately affected by diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and mental health disorders.<sup>16</sup>
- ▶ Diabetes and heart disease are among the top five leading causes of death for urban AI/AN people.<sup>17</sup>

## 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

- ▶ Address historical trauma
- ▶ Promote intergenerational knowledge on Traditional Foods
- ▶ Improve mental/physical/behavioral health<sup>18</sup>

### Special Diabetes Programs for Indians

- ▶ Helps manage and prevent diabetes
- ▶ Improves hemoglobin A1C, total and LDL cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure<sup>19</sup>

### Nutritional Counseling

- ▶ Can improve quality of life<sup>20</sup>
- ▶ Increases cooking self-efficacy and diet-related self-management<sup>21</sup>
- ▶ Can improve body composition, diet, nutrition knowledge, and physical activity in children and adolescents<sup>22</sup>

### Food Prescriptions

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

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". Model based off of Figure 1. in Food Diversity and Indigenous Food Systems to Combat Diet-Linked Chronic Diseases.

Dipayan Sarkar, Jacob Walker-Swaney & Kalidas Shetty, 4 Curr Dev Nutr 3 (2019), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7101483/> (last visited Mar 18, 2024).

For a list of citations please click here: [Traditional Foods Infographic Citations](#).