

# National and Community Partnerships to Reduce Commercial Tobacco Use in U.S. Tribes

by: Stephanie Bliss

## SUMMARY

The Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, in partnership with the following organizations—University of Arizona HealthCare Partnership, National Native Network, Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, Society for Public Health Education, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and San Carlos Apache Nation—has reached over 350,000 people living in tribal communities with its A PROMISE Partnership tobacco control and prevention project. Capacity and knowledge in tribal communities regarding tobacco control and prevention have increased, as shown in evaluations and success stories. In addition, we were able to create and disseminate culturally-specific materials that will sustain our work well after our program has ended.



## CHALLENGE

There are 566 federally recognized tribes, which are sovereign nations, in the United States today. Many tribes are facing disproportionate rates of chronic diseases and suffer from high rates of tobacco use. In addition, many tribes use a non-addictive form of tobacco in ceremonies, prayers, and for other cultural reasons, making mainstream tobacco interventions at times inappropriate for tribal communities. Meanwhile, smoking is the number one cause of preventable deaths in the U.S., killing approximately 480,000 people per year. According to the 2011 National Health Interview Survey, American Indian/Alaska Natives had the highest smoking prevalence of all the racial/ethnic groups at 21.8%. Also reported, 17.8% of American Indian/Alaska Natives smoked during pregnancy, compared to 13.9% of non-Hispanic white women.

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

You can assist in reducing the burden of commercial tobacco use in tribal communities. There are over 566 federally-recognized tribes in the United States. Partnering with local tribes or tribal organizations is an important way to improve the health of our country as a whole. Look for tribal communities or organizations near you or ones that are working towards reducing the use of commercial tobacco, and start building a relationship with them.

"The University of Arizona HealthCare Partnership was pleased to help actualize the objectives of the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan's project. Evaluations received from the REACH project indicate that community health leaders who earned certification along with continuing education credits in the Basic Tobacco Intervention Skills Certification for Native Communities increased their confidence to deliver brief tobacco dependence interventions specific to Native people."

—Louise J. Strayer, Director,  
University of Arizona  
HealthCare Partnership

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## SOLUTION

The Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan's A PROMISE Partnership program worked with two affiliate organizations, Red Star Innovations and Hannahville Indian Community, to create and sustain partnerships, build capacity, and disseminate evidence-based information. We formed ongoing partnerships with non-funded entities to increase the reach of our program. We certified health care workers using the University of Arizona HealthCare Partnership's Basic Tobacco Intervention Skills for Native Communities Certification Program, held a technical assistance workshop with over 150 participants, assisted with the implementation for systems change in three tribes, and created and disseminated many culturally-specific materials.

## RESULTS

This project has reduced the burden of commercial tobacco use in native communities across the U.S. We disseminated evidence-based information to over 350,000 people by the following methods: certification programs, national workshop, newsletters, digital stories, media campaign, social media, and websites. We increased the skills and knowledge of over 70 health care staff using the University of Arizona HealthCare Partnership's Basic Tobacco Intervention Skills Certification for Native Communities curriculum. Our national workshop was attended by over 150 participants and garnered positive reviews. At the local level, we worked to create and sustain a Wellness Advisory Council that helped to disseminate information throughout the community and to guide project activities, including an anti-smoking art contest with a nearby school. A billboard and calendars were created with the school's artwork and distributed throughout the community. A member of the Wellness Advisory Council said of the art contest, "It was one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had, because I know that if we changed one child's mind during the process, we may have literally saved a life."

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

A PROMISE Partnership's program goal is to reduce the burden of commercial tobacco use in tribal communities by disseminating best and promising practices that integrate commercial tobacco prevention and control with chronic disease programming. We achieved our goal by creating and sustaining partnerships both locally and nationally, disseminating evidence-based information via multiple websites and newsletters, and building capacity in tribal communities through trainings and other activities. To sustain our successes we trained over 70 health care employees in basic tobacco interventions skills, created and disseminated culturally-tailored materials, and created long-lasting partnerships.