



Alaska Native Health Status Report

Prepared by:

Alaska Native Epidemiology Center

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Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

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Photo by Joaquin Estus

Introduction

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium’s vision is that “Alaska Natives are the healthiest people in the world.” Monitoring health status helps us know where the Alaska Native population is on this path and how far there is to go to reach this vision.

This report provides an overview of the health status of Alaska Native people. By using data to monitor health status, significant improvements in health over time can be demonstrated. In addition, health areas which are a concern, or for which a disparity exists can be readily identified.

This report covers population demographics, leading causes of mortality and morbidity, as well as adolescent and adult lifestyle risk factors. Additional health status topics include maternal and child health, cancer and cancer screening, immunizations, diabetes, infectious diseases, environmental health, and dental health. At the end of this report, the reader will find region-specific health status overviews and how each region compares to the Alaska Native population statewide on selected measures.

The health status topics found in this report were selected from the national Healthy People 2010 document and the State of Alaska’s Healthy Alaskans 2010 document. Various data sources were accessed to compile this document. Each data source is subject to certain limitations. For more information on each data source, please refer to Appendix B.

We hope this document is useful as a reference tool for all those interested in Alaska Native health issues and for all those interested in assisting to achieve the vision of the Alaska Native population becoming the healthiest in the world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alaska Native Demographics

In FY2007 (October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007), there were 134,361 Alaska Natives in the Alaska Tribal Health System (ATHS). A larger proportion of the population is under the age of 20 as compared to the U.S. The number of Alaska Natives age 65 and older is estimated to triple between 2000 and 2030 (6,156 to 19,004).

The proportion of Alaska Native children under age 18 living below the poverty level exceeded 22%, double the U.S. White proportion.

Mortality

The Alaska Native all-causes death rate for 2004-2007 was 1.4 times that of U.S. Whites and 1.5 times that of Alaska Whites.

Cancer is the leading cause of death for Alaska Native people, accounting for 1 out of every 5 deaths. The Alaska Native cancer death rate was 30% greater than for U.S. Whites.

Heart disease is the second leading cause of death for Alaska Native people.

Unintentional injury is the third leading cause of death for Alaska Native people. The unintentional injury death rate is double that of Alaska Whites.

Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for Alaska Native people. The Alaska Native suicide death rate was 3.6 times greater than for U.S. Whites.

Morbidity

The following causes of hospitalizations accounted for nearly 50% of all Alaska Tribal Health System hospitalizations: childbirth, diseases of the respiratory system, injuries and poisoning, and diseases of the digestive system (FY2007).

The leading causes of outpatient visits for the Alaska Tribal Health System were for diseases of the respiratory system and for mental health disorders.

Lifestyle Risk Factors – Adults

The proportion of Alaska Native people estimated to be current smokers is twice that of Alaska non-Natives. (41% vs. 20%).

The prevalence of obesity increased 63% among Alaska Native people between 1991-1992 and 2005-2007.

Lifestyle Risk Factors – Adolescents

In 2007, 32% of Alaska Native high school students smoked cigarettes on one or more of the past 30 days. This was a significantly higher rate than for U.S. students (20%) and Alaska non-Native students (13%).

The proportion of Alaska Native high school students who were at-risk of overweight increased from 2003 to 2007 (13.0% to 21.4%).

Maternal and Child Health

Although there have been significant decreases, the infant mortality rate remains twice that of Alaska Whites. This disparity is largely due to post-neonatal mortality.

There has been a steady decline in the percent of Alaska Native women who report alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Cancer and Cancer Screening

The most frequently diagnosed cancers for Alaska Native people were colon/rectum, lung/bronchus and breast cancers. Together, these three types of cancer comprise over half of all new cancer diagnoses.

The Alaska Native colorectal cancer incidence is more than twice that for U.S. Whites. In GPRA year 2008, 50.1% of Alaska Native patients, age 51-80 years, had received colorectal cancer screening.

Immunizations

In GPRA Year 2008, 48.4% of Alaska Native patients age 65 years and older had received an influenza vaccination. 82.9% of Alaska Native patients age 19-35 months had received the 4:3:1:3:3 combination, meeting the Healthy People 2010 Goal.

Diabetes

Although the prevalence of diabetes among Alaska Native people is lower than among U.S. Whites, the prevalence of diabetes since 1990 has increased in every region and tripled in some.

Infectious Diseases

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) comprised 89.4% of all Alaska Native reportable infectious disease cases. Chlamydia was by far the most commonly reported STI.

Environmental Health

The percent of housing units with water and sewer service varies by major rural regional health corporation, from 58% to 98%.

Dental Health

In GPRA year 2008, 20% of Alaska Native patients had a documented dental visit within the past year.