The Invisible Minority

- The American Community Survey 2004 estimates there are nearly 2.2 million individuals in the United States who identify themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native (0.8 percent of the population)
- Another 1.9 million identify as part American Indian or Alaska Native
- For many, geographic location leaves those who reside, attend school, or work on reservations isolated from the rest of society
- Approximately 40% of all American Indians live on reservations; the remaining are culturally isolated and dispersed in cities across the United States
- Consequently, large gaps exist in current knowledge and what is known is often dated
Urban Native Youth

- American Indian youth living in a city also face potentially unique challenges
- 1950’s government-sponsored relocation programs removed many American Indian families from tribal lands and reservations to major cities across the U.S.
- Living off the reservation and disconnected from family and tribal ties also limits or eliminates access to tribal benefits and Indian Health services
- 2008 urban native youth study looking at protective factors against violence perpetration suggests that factors such as:
  - school connectedness
  - pro-social behaviors directed at peers and family members
  - positive affect

Demographic Challenges

• A third of all Native people are younger than 18 years old
• Fertility rates for girls 15-19 were 54.7% among AI/AN girls in 2006.
• More than 1/4 of the American Indian/Alaska Native population is living in poverty
• Family unemployment rates range from 14% overall to as high as 35% on some reservations
• Educationally there are fewer AI/AN individuals who have completed:
  – a high school diploma or GED
    • 71% vs. 80%
  – a bachelor’s degree
    • 11.5% vs. 24.4%

Social Challenges

• Compared to other ethnic/cultural groups, AI/AN communities have experienced the highest per-capita rate of violence over the last decade
• Many reservations and tribal areas carry a disproportionate load of risk factors contributing to violence and suicide
• Children between the ages of 12-19, in particular, are more likely to be victims of both serious violent crime and simple assault - compared to their non-Native peers
Native Youth and Suicide

- Among AI/AN youth age 15-24 years the suicide rate is more than 3 times higher than that of other young people in the U.S.
- AI/AN youth most likely to commit suicide have been found to share the following characteristics:
  - often a male, single 15-24 years of age
  - under the influence of alcohol or drugs just prior to attempt
  - has lived with a number of ineffective or inappropriate parental substitutes because of family disruption
  - raised by caretakers who have come into conflict with the law
  - often been jailed at an early age
  - experienced considerable emotional loss, abandonment, family divorce, death of relatives
  - experienced a past loss through violence of someone to whom he felt attached

Barriers to Seeking Help for Youth

- Lack of transportation or distance to travel to reach IHC clinic facilities [particularly off the reservation/urban Natives]
- Some services may require the presence and consent of a parent or caretaker
- Lack of privacy in community clinics on the reservation
- Trust is often difficult to establish when clinic providers are transient, not invested in the community or may be different at each session
- “Native code of silence”
Potential Recommendations

Research and evaluation in tribal communities must be participatory

• regardless of the methodology used for data - a participatory model is essential to working successfully in tribal communities
• participatory model often provides an impetus for change in the community
• the participatory model improves the problem-solving capacity of the community, whereby the community increases their ability to identify health issues and develop ways to address them.

Potential Recommendations

Increase opportunities for youth involvement in spirituality and traditional activities

• strongly supported in literature reviews and echoed repeatedly by Tribal Elders and leaders
• suggestions that youth should learn their language
• take part in spiritual ceremonies
• learn native stories and make crafts
• work with Elders to reclaim lost or forgotten traditions of their tribal history
Potential Recommendations

Increase communication and contact of youth with parents, Elders and other community members

• create opportunities for interactions as a means of increasing the transfer of cultural knowledge
• create opportunities for communication to provide support and reduce misunderstanding
• create gatherings such as male and female talking circles as a means to provide consistent role models in the community and offer mentorship for troubled youth

Potential Recommendations

Give youth a real and significant role in the community and in their family

• create the means by which youth see their value as a contributing and responsible member of their family
• create the means by which youth see their value as contributing members of the community [urban or reservation] - learning an taking on appropriate age-related responsibility
• increase opportunities for peer counseling among youth in similar age groups
• increase opportunities for community sports and supervised activities
Video Questions for Youth

1. How has violence affected your life?
2. Do you feel that violence affects males more than females? Or both equally? Why?
3. What “risks” [if any] seem to make some people more vulnerable to violence than others?
4. What does the concept — “cycle of violence” mean to you? How do you think it works?
5. How can each of you help yourself and help one another to feel safe and protected from violence on the reservation?
6. What are some possibilities for strategies to stop violence from affecting youth on the reservation?